THE ELECTION!?

COMMONWEAL

A Review of Religion, Politics, and Culture

December 1, 2000

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To the Editors

Sing on!

Bravo! to Willard Francis Jabusch for his essay on "Relative Morality" (November 3). I agree 100 percent. One doesn't label people "evil" or "sinful" when it is your relative or friend, and you know the person's circumstances.

By the way, I have an old record album I bought in 1967 of "Songs of Good News," folk melodies by Father Willard Jabusch approved for liturgical use. I still play them now and then. (I'm seventy-one years old.)

Hang in there, Father! The essay was a breath of fresh air.

TERESA MOTTET
Richland, Iowa

Theologians too

Willard Jabusch's "Relative Morality" makes a good point and does so gently. May I add the observation that not only are highly placed bureaucrats in danger of losing touch with ordinary folk, academic theologians are in a similar danger. Perhaps they are in touch with their families, but how in touch are they with the people who live out their faith in the world? As a pastor I have often felt that academic theologians have little knowledge of the faithful with whom pastors deal every day, and that the controversies we read about are between two very out-of-touch groups.

(REV.) PAUL ANDREW HOTTINGER
Downers Grove, Ill.

Making sausages

Paul Baumann's column "Counting Votes" (November 3) outlines the frustration and futility of the church's attempts to influence the political environment of the United States. For too long, many Catholics have comforted themselves by voting for candidates who proclaim they are "prolife," thus feeling they were casting their votes in accordance with their faith. If only it were that simple! For too often these candidates can do nothing about abortion (witness the frequent querying of school board candidates on abortion). Candidates mouth opposition to abortion because it is an easy way to pick up the "Catholic vote," and then they proceed to ignore virtually every other Catholic principle. Trying to vote according to Catholic principles is like trying to stuff a sausage open on both ends; as soon as you get something in one end, something else falls out the other.

Distributing guides or questioning candidates on their positions *vis-à-vis* Catholic teaching is an exercise in futility until we have candidates who embrace more than one or two of our principles. That would be a candidate who opposes abortion and the death penalty, who supports civil rights for gays and lesbians and aid to private schools, who supports organized labor and seeks to improve public education, who opposes economic sanctions against impoverished nations and is vocal in support of human rights.

ERIC STOLTZ
Los Angeles, Calif.

My bishop's vote

Re: "Counting Votes." That Catholic church leaders in northern Virginia chose to become so blatantly involved in partisan politics disappoints and saddens me. On the last Sunday before the election, our parish priest read us a letter from our bishop. The bishop's letter, in effect, said that if we were to vote for Al Gore over George Bush (who has shown no compassion for people on death row in Texas) for president, and Chuck Robb over George Allen (who hasn't shown much compassion for anybody) for U.S. senator, then we could not be good Catholics, because Gore and Robb are not "prolife." The bishop's letter also paid lip service to "family life," "social justice," and "global solidarity," saying absolutely nothing about the meaning of these words; they really did not matter. I still believe that Al Gore would be a more compassionate Christian president than George Bush, and that Chuck Robb was a more compassionate, Christian senator than George Allen will ever be.

How I wish I could vote for bishop!

ANTHONY J. DISTEFANO
Alexandria, Va.

False & offensive

I am flattered that Monsignor George Higgins has over the years discussed so often the relatively little writing I have done about organized labor in the United States (November 3).

Contra his suggestion, I am in complete agreement with Catholic social doctrine on the right of workers to join unions. He continues to have the unenviable task of explaining why so many workers in America choose not to exercise that right. Monsignor Higgins writes: "Neuhaus never publicly spoke this way about the cardinal's stand on labor issues while the cardinal was alive. I think it is a great pity that he held his fire until it was too late for O'Connor to respond." That is both false and offensive.

The cardinal was well aware of my public statements on the labor question and of our differing views on aspects of that question. My most extensive discussion of these matters is in the 1992 book, *Doing Well and Doing Good: The Challenge to the Christian Capitalist*, which the cardinal praised highly, while not agreeing with all of it. Our friendship was of the kind that accommodated respectful disagreement, as I hope is also true of my relationship with Monsignor Higgins, even when he makes it difficult.

(REV.) RICHARD JOHN NEUHAUS
The writer is president of The Institute on Religion and Public Life.

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COMMONWEAL

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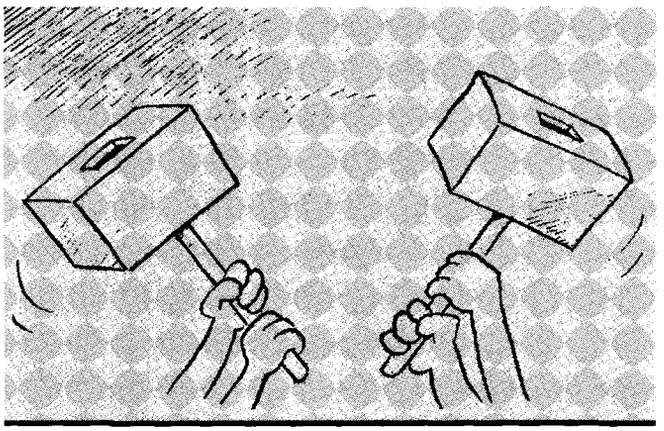

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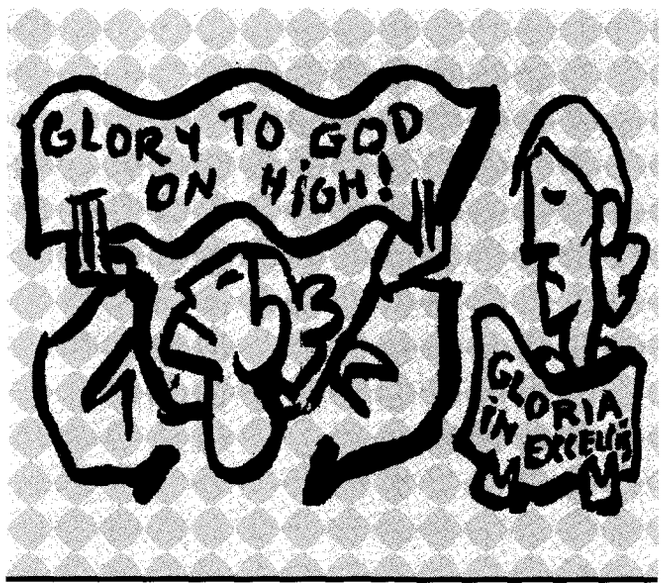

THE LAST WORD

Baptist is nice. Catholic is home.
Christopher A. Conroy 31

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(Continued from page 2)

Bishops count

I am a deacon in the Archdiocese of Louisville and, along with my wife, am active in prison ministry. Some of what Kathleen Reagan discusses in "Prison Ministry" (September 8) resonates with some of our experiences. Especially here in the Bible belt, Catholics are often given the "leftovers" when it comes to scheduling of available chapel time. This is not lost on the Catholic community within the prisons.

Quite recently Archbishop Thomas Kelly of Louisville visited our institution. Reagan's comment about the "man in the red dress" is accurate. While planning for the archbishop's visit, we were accorded a level of cooperation, especially from the deputy warden who oversees chapel activities, we have never before experienced. In our diocese most of the prison ministry is done by the deacons, with two priests who offer Mass on a regular basis, and two more my wife and I recruited as occasional fill-ins. As in many other dioceses, there is no structured prison ministry at the diocesan level. But we do get some financial support and Archbishop Kelly is our biggest backer. It would be easier, I believe, for dioceses to develop a formal program if there were some national leadership taken by the bishops. Thank you for Reagan's article.

JOSEPH STUBER
Louisville, Ky.

Enough triumphalism

I commend Philip Kennedy for recognizing that *Dominus Iesus* is a document "devoid" of the "humble penitence" that is proper to a pilgrim church always seeking a better understanding of the divine revelation (October 20). Neither the Catholic church nor any other body can claim to have more than a partial grasp of this revelation, because, by definition, it surpasses all understanding. Thus, the triumphalist tone of *Dominus Iesus* is entirely unjustified. Moreover, as Kennedy notes, to link the defense of orthodox, Trinitarian Christianity so thoroughly with assent to the doctrine of apostolic succession is regrettable. Quite apart from questions about the historicity of apostolic succession, such a link needlessly alienates the millions of non-Catholic Christians who would happily serve alongside the Catholic church as allies in a conflict against relativism, but who have no wish to be her "gravely deficient" subordinates.

WILLIAM D. WOOD
Chicago, Ill.

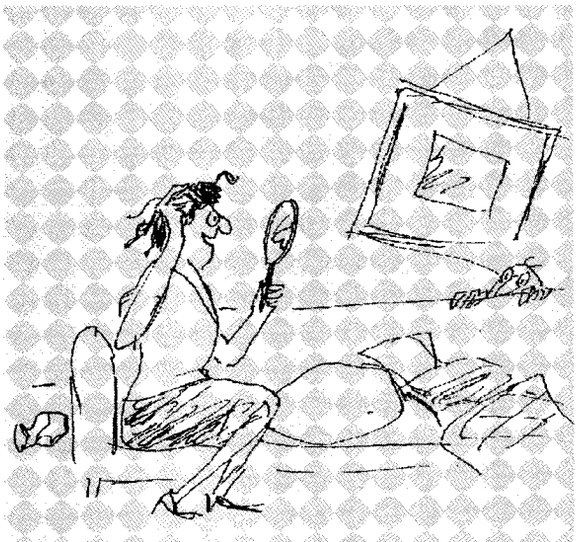
A charter for sneaks

It was a pleasure to read the views of a trained legal mind on the consequences of becoming an official Catholic university: John F. Hunt, "Look Before You Sign" (November 3).

I was particularly intrigued by Hunt's treatment of the "probity of life" aspect of the implementation of *Ex corde ecclesiae*. He referred to an article by Clifford Longley in the *Tablet*, August 28, 1999—"License for Vatican Sneaks." I checked back, and I found to my surprise that the "delation" process described there was actually about individuals who denounce their own bishops. That is not to imply that Hunt was misrepresenting the material. I believe it is safe to say that if the CDF has no objection to private individuals denouncing their bishops, they would hardly balk at such individuals denouncing members of university faculties and administrations.

The *Tablet* article is very strong. Anonymous delation, it observes, "is a charter for sneaks. It leads to a climate of resentment, division, distrust, suspicion, and even paranoia. Anything more calculated to drive out charity and undermine the communion of mutual trust, love, and respect between a bishop and his people, not to mention between him and the Vatican, would be hard to devise. It is destructive; it is underhand; it is surely the devil's work....Cardinal Ratzinger once defended the practice on the grounds, more or less, that his was a small department that could not possibly police the whole church unless there were people prepared to rat on their priests and bishops....The practice of secret delation—and I am sorry to have to use such language—is a scandal to the faithful and a disgrace to the papacy."

JAMES COSGROVE
Wantagh, N.Y.



"You're right. I am beautiful when I'm angry!"

Think again

In your editorial on the presidential debates (October 10), you argue that a health exception to a ban on late-term abortions "makes any prospective ban meaningless." I don't see why this should necessarily be the case. It's true that in the past, the Supreme Court has defined "health" very broadly to include almost any physical or mental complaint. But the current Court has not ruled on whether a more narrow defini-

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Limbo

As we write (Tuesday, November 21, 3:00 P.M., EST), it is two weeks after Election Day, and still the United States has no president-elect. Perhaps by the time this issue of *Commonweal* is in your hands, we will—but then again, perhaps we won't.

Should we worry?

The United States still has a president, who is enjoying his final lap around the track, but certainly able and willing to govern. There is no constitutional crisis. The republic has not crumbled. No rogue nation is causing immediate trouble, and no new wars have broken out. After initial jitters, the stock market goes its erratic way. The rest of the world is having a good laugh at the wildly divergent election practices and ballots of the greatest democratic nation in history. Let them laugh. Americans themselves seem to be calmly observing one of the most remarkable civic lessons in the nation's history—"not since the eighth grade have I thought about the electoral college," reports a cheerful woman on CNN.

Only TV commentators and campaign apparatchiks are on the verge of hysteria, assuring one another that the American public is demanding closure—now! Not really. (Are the networks preparing the next headline "Constitutional Crisis," for mid-December? With or without a question mark?)

The phrase "permanent campaign" has taken on a new meaning: William Daley (for Gore) and James Baker (for Bush) in Florida should strike terror in the heart of any reformer working to limit national elections to strictly two years!

The candidates-in-limbo, Al Gore and George Bush, have been no more inspiring in the interregnum than during the campaign. Bush's brooding withdrawal to his Texas ranch, while others make his case, is troubling. Where would he go as president during a real national crisis? Gore's hyperactive, behind-the-scenes politicking summons an image of the consummate pol, Bill Clinton, but without the ability to win friends and influence people. He has failed, for example, to speak plainly and promptly about why a recount matters. Neither Bush nor Gore has displayed the qualities Americans like to think of as presidential, but then inauguration day isn't until January. Perhaps the mantle of office will endow the winner with a tad of charisma.

The Florida Supreme Court will likely have the final say in what must be included in the certified count that will award the state's twenty-five electoral votes to the winning candidate, and then we will have a president-elect. Appropriate processes and procedures are in place right up to mechanisms, if need be, for choosing the new president in the United States House of Representatives. It only remains for the loser to bow out gracefully and the winner to gird for battle. All of this is cumbersome, but so far none of it is unreasonable or chaotic.

So no, don't worry—yet.

The real trouble, if trouble there be, will come when the winner takes office. Bush or Gore? Will either have the legitimacy conferred by a decisive choice of the voters—and one that appears to be decisive? If Bush is the next president, he will have won the Electoral College, but not the popular vote. If it is Gore, he will have won both, but the Republicans' stolen-election rhetoric will poison the well.

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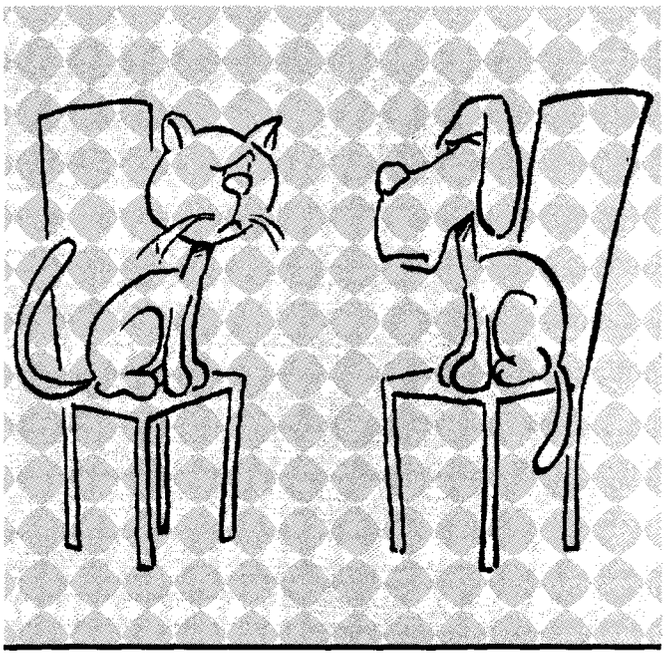

It will be very tempting during a Gore presidency for congressional Republicans to carry out the Clinton impeachment by other means.

In any case, a Congress almost evenly divided between the two parties will make it hard for either man to carry out his campaign promises, or perhaps even to exercise the most basic activities of government—making judicial appointments, writing budgets, rewriting tax codes, conducting foreign policy, among others.

Is this what Americans voted for—stalemate? That's not out of the question. The country has lived with stalemate for at least the last six years under Clinton. Arguably the last truly activist government, under Ronald Reagan, left the country with record deficits—hardly an experiment many Americans want to see repeated.

The campaign showed real differences in what each man, if elected president, would do about Social Security, Medicare, school vouchers, and the Supreme Court. Does a vote so close mean that the American public has said, "none of the above"?

One of the luxuries of a functioning democracy in good times may be the choice of not choosing—but it is a perilous choice should circumstances change, as they are bound to.

DEPARTMENT OF AMPLIFICATION

We were pleased that so many readers took the time to respond to "The Homosexual Agenda" (October 6; see Correspondence, November 3 and November 17). Rather than reply to each, we'd like to amplify briefly two points.

On politics The editorial was about politics and the entrance of gays and lesbians into the political arena. There is an agenda—why not call it a homosexual agenda?—just as there has been a black agenda, a feminist agenda, a labor-union agenda. Entering the political arena puts proposals to the test: the whole society gets to debate their merits and vote them up or down. That's what makes politics a risky business. Some gay and lesbian spokespersons, and at least some news coverage, view criticism of the homosexual agenda, especially criticism of same-sex unions, as a form of bigotry. We think this sort of language should be avoided. The resort to accusations of racism or sexism in recent public debates about affirmative action and reproductive "choice" made political deliberation rancorous and distorted the real issues at stake. In a similar sense, we think there are honest and reasoned arguments against same-sex unions; they should be given a fair chance to enter the debate without having the moral integrity of persons expressing such views questioned at every turn. Seeking judicial fiats for same-sex unions short-circuits the debate that is the responsibility of legislative bodies. The Vermont Supreme Court effectively ordered the legislature to apply civil-union rules to homosexual couples. At least some of Vermont's citizens vowed to throw out legislators who complied. That's democracy.

On remedies In commenting on the turn to the courts for remedies against discrimination, we did not offer a pain-and-suffering equation that ruled in African Americans and ruled out women and homosexuals. We simply pointed to a historical fact: the consequences, first of slavery, later segregation, and finally discrimination, prevented many in the African-American community from having an equal opportunity in this society. As a society, we owed African Americans redress for great historical wrongs. It is at least debatable that this is so for women and gays.

We are sure this will clarify matters.

ET CETERA

Nothing sacred ■ "I Want a Divorce!" is not the cry of a wounded spouse, or the title of a Hillary Clinton tell-all. Rather, in the tradition of "Survivor" and "Big Brother," and as the antithesis of the scandalous "Who Wants to Marry a Multimillionaire?" it is the title of an upcoming Fox television program in which divorcing couples compete in a game-show format to retain their possessions. But wait, there's more.

- "Surprise Wedding" aired on November 2 as a special in which five women, frustrated by their boyfriends' ambivalence toward marriage, invited the men to Las Vegas under the pretense of having won a makeover contest. The women then went off to be made beautiful and the men received tickets to a Vegas show. The show turned out to be them, and in front of a studio audience of fifteen hundred, their relationship's history was made public and they had a chance to propose. On stage.
- "Love Cruise" will put a group of singles on a ship to play "musical dates." The "losers" will be voted off the ship (where will they go?) until, as Mike Darnell, Fox's execu-

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tive vice president for alternative programming, put it, "the couple most in love wins."

- Fox's "Temptation Island," will strand couples on an island populated by male and female models waiting to test their relationship's fidelity quotient. Whoever succumbs loses.
- Not to be outdone, the UPN network has created "Temptation Manor," upping the ante to partner-swapping as the test of faithfulness. At the end, each contestant must choose between the person she or he came with and any of the other contestants.

What does all this mean? "I think there will be a great deal of voyeuristic fun because divorce is such a national phenomenon and people maybe don't take marriage as seriously as they used to," says Peter Isacksen, executive producer of "I Want a Divorce." Indeed. Proving his point, the producers of MTV's "Road Rules," which puts a group of strangers together in a motor home and gives them weekly tasks to complete while driving across the country, recently "challenged" its participants to pair up and get married in Las Vegas—only to divorce within twenty-four hours. But, we are assured, there is no need to worry about any public humiliation in this type of program, because, as Isacksen says, "the tone of the show is not going to be anything that anyone is embarrassed about."

With more shows like these on the horizon, one is left wondering what areas of our private lives are left to be explored as fodder for telecasts. As the guilty pleasure of "reality TV" gains ground—Germans call this type of delight *schadenfreude*, or finding pleasure in the misfortunes of others—our private spaces are increasingly colonized by television production companies. Shows like "Blind Date," which follows a couple around on their first date, and "House Calls," which allows us to peek in on a session between a psychologist and a couple, come with a price. They erode our understanding not only of the private, but also of human dignity. When our most private events are laid bare in the public square, the value of the human *qua* the human, and not merely as market share, begins to blur.

What's next, a camera-rigged "Catholic Confessional"? It remains something of a surprise that more of the sacraments haven't been tapped for the tube. Don't tell Mother Angelica.

OF SEVERAL MINDS

E.J. DIONNE Jr.

CROSSING THE LINE

Republicans' scorched-earth tactics

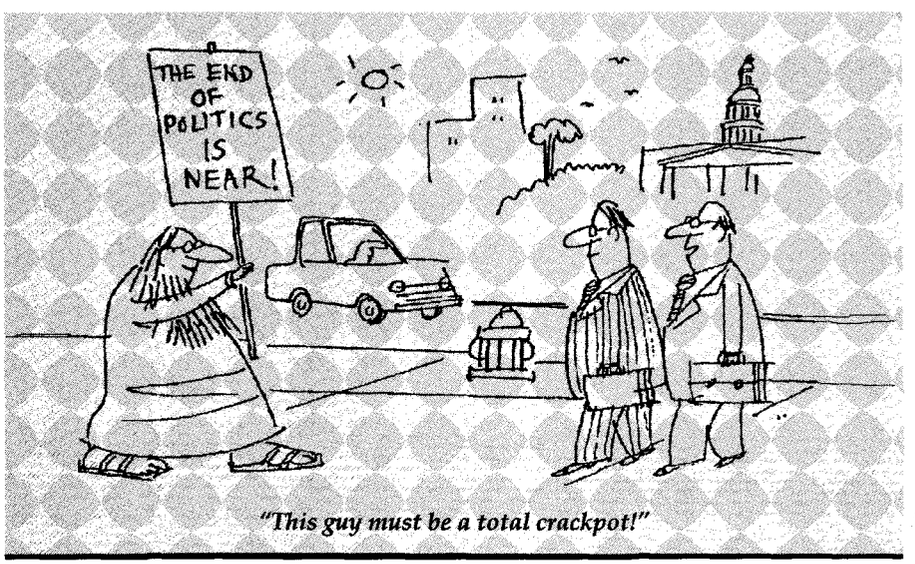
It's both right and fashionable to talk about how the Florida election impasse should be resolved in a way that will allow whoever wins our presidential election to govern.

There are lofty disquisitions on how important it will be for the new president to pursue a moderate program and to name a cabinet that includes members of the opposition party. It's all perfectly reasonable. But none of it will matter if one side comes to be seen as being so partisan in its effort to seize the presidency that it didn't care a whit about facts, traditions, laws, legitimate disagreement, or the rights of its adversaries.

Let there be no pretense: Both campaigns have been aggressively pursuing their own interests. But the efforts of Republicans to delegitimize Al Gore's insistence on a hand recount in a very close election will prove especially destructive. It involves turning a matter of immediate convenience into an issue of high doctrine. People who never had a single thought about what hand recounts do or don't mean have suddenly discovered they hold unshakeable principles on the subject.

They now rhapsodize about the virtues of machines and computers in comparison with living, breathing, thinking human beings. Never mind that state laws (in Texas, for example) and Republican candidates have long leaned on hand recounts to validate what voters actually intended.

The Bush campaign has followed a two-step strategy. Inside the counting rooms, its supporters challenged every ballot that might have been cast for Al Gore. The challenges, which are their legitimate right, also slowed down and complicated the count.



"This guy must be a total crackpot!"

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Outside the counting rooms, the Bush people acted as if their supporters weren't even inside—and then seized on the complexity those supporters created to discredit the process. They decried the recounts as terribly partisan, controlled by "Democrat" counties. They pretended that Democrats just sat there, undisturbed, making up votes for Al Gore. But if the process weren't open, they wouldn't have had the grist for many of the charges they threw around on television.

Republicans crowed when the recounts didn't immediately produce as many votes for Gore as Democrats had hoped they would. But if the counting had been as partisan as the Republicans claimed, Gore would have quickly gone ahead of Bush on the basis of votes "manufactured" by his minions in those "Democrat" counties.

If the Bush partisans had been honest about what they were doing—pursuing a tough strategy aimed at minimizing the Democratic vote—they would have been well within the tradition of these fights. All recounts are difficult. Many in the past have devolved into shouting and even fistfights.

But Bush's supporters were doing something more insidious: They pretended that Gore, in pursuing his legitimate rights as a candidate in a very close contest, was trying to steal the election. "We are witnessing nothing less than a theft in process," said House Whip Tom DeLay (R-Tex.). The normally reasonable governor of Montana, Marc Racicot, said that Gore was willing to "win at any cost."

No, Gore just wanted a recount—which, yes, he hoped would give him victory.

So did Republicans who found themselves behind in other close races held the same day as the Bush-Gore contest. Take the case of Republican congressional candidate Dick Zimmer in New Jersey, who sought a recount in his narrow race with Congressman Rush Holt, a Democrat. As of November 20, Zimmer said he was running four hundred to five hundred votes behind. Roughly two hundred ninety thousand votes were cast. "I owe it to the people who voted for me to make sure that it was an accurate and legitimate count," he said in an interview.

Perfectly fair. And Zimmer's deficit was proportionately larger than Gore's in Florida. If Zimmer was entitled to a recount, which he was, then Gore was at least as entitled.

Again, there's nothing wrong with the Bush apparat protecting its candidate's interests. But its vicious attacks on Gore and Democratic officials in Florida have created deep resentments among Democrats everywhere else. They will never believe a single word Bush says about his alleged desire to overcome partisanship and to bring people together.

Assume for a moment that Bush wins the presidency at the end of this mess. Republicans (including Bush's campaign people and their supporters in the commentating class) have done great damage to his ability to be a successful president.

Republicans never understood how angry Democrats were about the impeachment of President Bill Clinton. That anger encompassed even those Democrats who were furious at the president and despised the mess his scandal created for their party and their country.

Once again, Republicans have underestimating the impact of their inflammatory rhetoric and their willingness to push matters to the limit, and beyond. What has been said and done will not be forgotten in six months, or in a year—or in four years. □

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Translating Now

for Samuel Menashe

Maintenant,
from the French.
La main, the hand,
wed to the verb
tenir, to hold.
As if in one's
hand, *la main.*
Becomes *maintenant,*
that which one holds
in one's hand.
Not *le passé,* the past.
That which is
beyond our holding.
Nor *l'avenir*, the future.
That which is
beyond our grasping.
But *maintenant*, the present.
That which we
hold in our hand.
All we can ever
hold in our hand.

Daniel Thomas Moran

OF SEVERAL MINDS

PAUL BAUMANN

PIUS XII & THE HOLOCAUST

Sorting out a tragic legacy

Pius XII's response or lack of response to the Nazi extermination of the Jews has been the subject of heated controversy since Rolf Hochhuth's 1964 play *The Deputy* depicted the princely Eugenio Pacelli as a miser and a coward. Last year John Cornwell's tendentious *Hitler's Pope* (Viking) reinvigorated Hochhuth's malevolent caricature, charging Pius with anti-Semitism, connivance with Hitler's rise to power, and, in case slow readers didn't get the point, even with starting World War I.

A stream of books published this fall tries to make sense of Pius's seeming indifference to the fate of the Jews. *Hitler, the War, and the Pope* (Our Sunday Visitor), by law professor Ronald J. Rychlak, includes a vigorous rebuttal of Cornwell. Ralph McInerny, Notre Dame's happy scourge of heterodoxy, has also

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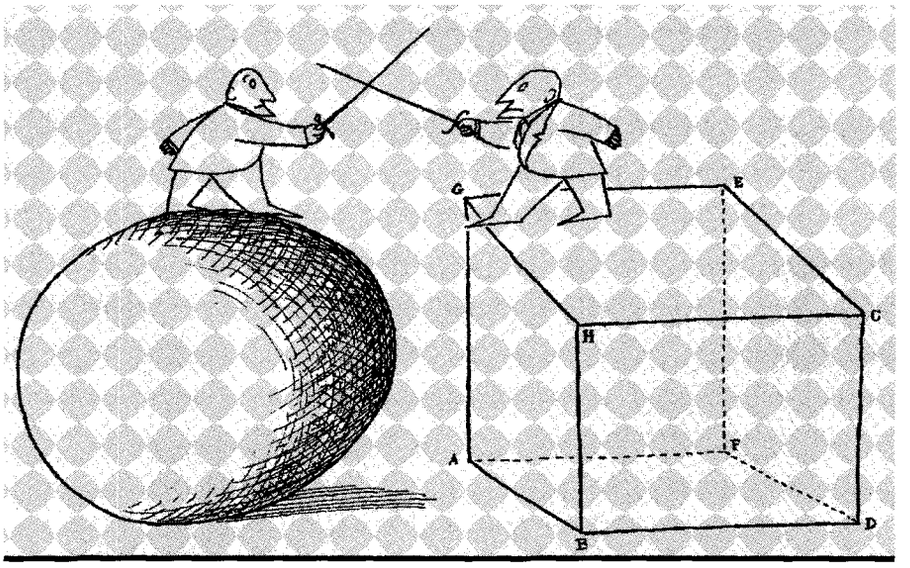
risen to Pius's defense in *The Defamation of Pius XII* (Saint Augustine Press). In a more useful vein, Holocaust historian Michael Phayer's *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust, 1930–1965* (Indiana University Press) offers a detailed historical analysis of the period. Tireless readers have only to wait until January for James Carroll's *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews, A History* (Houghton Mifflin). The crusading Carroll ends his tome with a fifty-page exhortation titled "A Call for Vatican III."

Making moral and historical sense of Pius's actions is a painful and daunting task, a task not made easier by those who bring strong ecclesiological agendas to the table. Nor is clarity achieved by regarding criticism of Pius as anti-Catholicism in fashionable guise, or defense of Pius as anti-Semitism by other means. An excellent example of how to avoid these dangers was on display last month when Fordham University at Lincoln Center hosted a conversation between distinguished historians Michael Marrus and Gerald P. Fogarty, S.J. The program was part of the university's annual Nostra Aetate Dialogues that usually attract a crowd of vocal Catholic and Jewish New Yorkers. Both Marrus and Fogarty are members of the Vatican commission now examining the church's records relating to the Holocaust. In October the commission, made up of three Catholic and three Jewish scholars, recommended that the Vatican open its entire archives, previously published in edited form, to public scrutiny.

Before a standing-room-only crowd, Marrus and Fogarty discussed a single document, a letter sent from Pius XII to President Franklin D. Roosevelt on July 20, 1943, shortly after the first Allied bombing of Rome. As Marrus, author of the indispensable *The Holocaust in History* (Meridan), explained, it is important to "try to enter into the worldview and the habits of mind and thinking of the Vatican at that time." Pacelli was a skilled diplomat, intent on securing the church's prerogatives from whatever nation he was negotiating with, even the United States. The letter protested the destruction of the basilica of Saint Lorenzo, noted that the Vatican's diplomatic



neutrality was "deep in [the church's] apostolic nature," mourned the loss of civilian life, and concluded by reminding Roosevelt that civilization rested on the foundation of Christianity. The letter's arcane style stressed moral principles, used symbolic language, and was vague about specifics. Pius's language, Marrus said, is "prolix and obscure" and its meaning "difficult to extract."

However, the letter did mark an alteration in Vatican policy. Urged to speak out against the Nazi euthanasia program, the bombing of London, and the invasion of Poland, the Vatican remained silent. If he were to denounce the actions of the Nazis, Pius warned American diplomats, he would also have to denounce Stalin. But when it came to the destruction of Rome's sacred places, Vatican neutrality wavered. "His primary concern," Fogarty said, "was that of the church." In this, Marrus observed, the pope revealed himself as "strangely parochial."

Pius's unwillingness to protest explicitly the murder of the Jews was, in large part, the result of a misplaced faith in diplomacy and his religious parochialism. By Christmas of 1942 the Vatican knew of the Nazi genocide. A concerted effort was mounted by the Allies to get the pope to condemn the Nazis in his Christmas message. Although Pius denounced racial persecution and killing, "the word Jew was not mentioned," Marrus said.

At this point, hissing and grumbling was heard from the crowd at Fordham. But, Marrus, who is Jewish, insisted on complicating the picture further. Although "the information is there [about the Holocaust], awareness isn't always there. People didn't always get it." "However we judge these reasons now," Marrus explained, the Vatican honestly thought "explicitness would make the suffering worse for the Jews."

The audience's impatience with Marrus's failure to simply condemn Pius was even more audible now. Bravely, he pressed on. Both Catholic and Jewish victims of the Nazis appealed to the pope to make explicit charges against Hitler. Pius's basic instincts led him to reject such appeals. If we are to sit in judgment, Marrus said, we must try "to wrap our minds around the spirituality of Pius XII." Beseeched by the German bishops to protest the deaths of hundreds of thousands of German civilians, Pacelli instead urged German Catholics to recognize God's judgment, and to "accept the misfortune that has come upon them with a spirit of penance."

When asked what should be done about the crimes of war, invariably Eugenio Pacelli's answer was that we should pray. "This is a response that sounds so utterly incommensurate," Marrus noted. "Yet for Pacelli, this is what he was supposed to do."

In certain circumstances, Pius's tragic legacy reminds us, even genuine piety can be a moral error. □

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Wilson Carey McWilliams

SPLIT DOWN THE MIDDLE

Election without a mandate

Around kitchen tables and water coolers, Americans have been talking politics and even learning about our institutions, but that gleam in the political darkness is fading pretty quickly. The Florida recount, with its multiplying spins and legal maneuvers, its tackiness and excess, has been turning excitement into impatience, and with the certainty of a tainted presidency, neither party is really sure that it wants to win.

Both parties made at least symbolic efforts to bridge the culture gap. Neither succeeded. Bush outdid Dole chiefly by capturing erstwhile Perot supporters. White men and married white women were Bush's sources of strength. Gore drew his from blacks and Latinos and Jews, from single women, from most trade unionists, and from the elderly. (Catholics, divided almost evenly, seem caught between fires.)

Still, Democrats have more reasons than Republicans for discontent, and not only because Bush looks to be the winner. Despite some chilly consolations—Al Gore's edge in the popular vote, for example, or the party's fine new voices in the Senate—for Democrats, this will be a winter of recriminations and regrets. Ralph Nader will be a favored villain, and Hillary Clinton will not be alone in grumbling about the Electoral College, but there are plenty of targets. In an election this close, anything has a claim to be considered decisive.

Yet it was Al Gore's election to lose; he did just that, and not only because he was so wretched in the debates. Probably, prosperity should have been enough to elect him, especially since about two-thirds of the electorate, Republican arguments to the contrary, gave the administration credit for good times. Possibly the economy was *too* successful, especially since, by focusing on the economic future rather than the past—partly in the hope of putting distance between himself and Bill Clinton—Gore seemed to take the present good times as given, a starting point for argument. That, in turn, made it easier for Bush to appeal to voters' dreams of becoming rich, or at least richer. A lot of us, moreover, felt secure enough to give first place to other issues: foreign policy, for example, or the military, but preeminently the worries about the moral state of the country that, in a CNN poll back in 1999, led economic concerns by a three-to-two margin.

And morality, public or private, is not comfortable ground for Democrats.

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That our politics is increasingly dominated by money is no secret: party loyalties are weaker and party organizations weaker still; civil society is fragmenting; it's next to impossible to reach the electorate except through the electronic media. For Republicans, raising money is a comparatively easy nuisance. Democrats, for obvious reasons, have to scramble, cut corners, and take money wherever they can find it (or to look for multimillionaires who can finance campaigns like Jon Corzine in New Jersey or Mark Dayton in Minnesota). Just when Gore and Lieberman had been occupying the moral high ground, they had to interrupt their critique of the media to show up at a Hollywood bash featuring the sex-and-violence crowd, proclaiming good will and disclaiming any intent to censor. It hurt, especially since it revived memories of the Buddhist temple and the White House telephones. And while Gore's effort to distance himself from Bill Clinton was sensible, up to a point, he carried it so far as to be self-defeating: it kept Gore from reminding voters about the ideological obstructionism of the Republican Congress—especially the tragicomedy of impeachment—an argument for voting the Democratic ticket, and one which could have brought Bush's airy superficialities into clearer focus. It was also futile: Keeping the president under wraps did not significantly lessen Clinton fatigue; it only denied Democrats much of the benefit of Clinton's craft and charm.

The real story in the election, however, wasn't the winners and losers; it was the turnout, higher than had been expected (50.7 percent, up from 49 percent in 1996). Voters weren't drawn to the polls by the candidates: comparatively few Democrats felt more than a mild enthusiasm for Gore or more than a half-amused disdain for Bush; Bush benefited from a desire to punish Clinton and all his works, but Bush too inspired only tepid devotion. The nation's view of the candidates was epitomized by a television ad for the candy bar "Snickers," which featured cartoon figures of the Democratic donkey and the Republican elephant, each caricaturing the foibles of that party's candidate. ("My dad and I wear the same pants," the elephant brags, and the donkey rejoins, "I invented pants.") Evidently, advertising research discovered a public judgment that both nominees were *jokes*.

Voters were apt to say that the issues helped draw them to the polls, and, Ralph Nader aside, they seem to have had little difficulty in detecting differences between the candidates. But that said, the debate over policy was not the sort to arouse any political passion beyond exasperation. Gore was cautious to a fault, far more concerned to defend things as they are than to stake out new territory, softening almost every answer rather than give offense. And on the Republican side, Bush's strategy *turned* on blurring the issues, especially in social policy, a version of Reagan's style, amiable and given to elision, verging on innumeracy and untroubled by disconfirming facts. Voters can be forgiven, in other words, if they saw the distinctions between the candidates, while real, as relatively marginal.

Yet if the contestants were second-rate and the stakes

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seemingly low, the race itself was desperately close: the electorate was drawn to the polling places—and to discussions after election day—by an increased sense that individual votes might matter, that citizens might really make a difference. And while individual voters, even in an election as close as this one, are still not significant, a handful of voters in Florida *will* have decided the presidency of the United States. Back in September, I argued in these pages that the key to the election of 2000 could be found in the popularity of "Survivor," with its implicit appeal to the political animal in our souls, our yearning for something closer to genuine self-government. This November proved the point, I think, in the election and its aftermath.

The candidates themselves barely approached that sentiment. Gore's watchword, "I'll fight for you," offered the vice president as a champion, an advocate *for* us in the corridors of power. His mastery of detail, his command of numbers and the nuances of policy emphasized his aptitude for infighting among policy elites. But he did not offer to take us *with* him, nor did he suggest that he needed anything *from* us beyond our votes. His rhetoric—so often smarmy and falsely sentimental—made virtually no reference to the common life: when Bush suggested that taxes are "the people's money" and not "the government's," Gore did not even make the obvious response that the money is *ours*. He presented himself as a leader in the high Progressive mold, an expert who will fight our battles for us, not a leader who will make us more able to fight for ourselves. It was in character that Gore rarely referred to party, still the best link between citizens and their representatives.

Bush, by contrast, spoke the language of people for whom government is overwhelming, impersonal, and, at best, indifferent, not much different from the other titanic forces that are hammering their lives. To millions of Americans, especially in the South and West, Bush appeared to be offering a kind of limited immunity, promising to shrink government at home and American involvements abroad. Of course, Bush's promise to "trust the people" amounts to leaving individuals to face the market and globalization more or less alone (just as his program would radically increase inequality). The greater number of voters, especially in and around the metropolitan centers, saw through it and rejected it, and even Bush's supporters hoped for a leader able to get past gridlock. Government, still relatively accountable, is our best hope for a measure of effective self-rule, though it urgently needs to be made better. The Clinton administration has its excellences, but it has been largely indifferent to the need to revive democratic life. Perhaps, out of power, the Democrats will learn better: in both its talk and its silence, the American public, this year, is trying to teach us something. □

Wilson Carey McWilliams *is the author of* Beyond the Politics of Disappointment? American Elections 1980–1999 *(Chatham House).*

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JUSTICE DEFERRED

The Salvadoran military & U.S. policy

Robert E. White

On Friday, November 3, in Palm Beach, Florida, two retired Salvadoran military officers, both former defense ministers, General José Guillermo García and General Eugenio Vides Casanova, were cleared of any liability in the murder of four American women on December 2, 1980, by Salvadoran national guardsmen. The women were Maryknoll sisters, Ita Ford and Maura Clarke; Dorothy Kazel, an Ursuline; and Jean Donovan, a lay missionary.

November 3, 2000, almost twenty years after the four women were murdered, was a day of profound disappointment for the families of the American churchwomen. "I thought the evidence was overwhelming," said William Ford, brother of Ita Ford. The families were represented pro bono by two prominent Florida attorneys, Robert Montgomery and Robert Kerrigan. The Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, through its research and persistence, was instrumental in bringing the civil case to trial in federal district court under a 1991 federal law, the Torture Victims Protection Act.

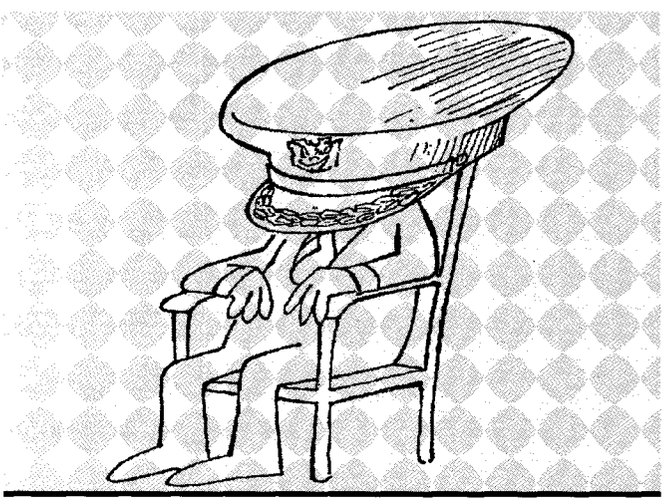
As U.S. ambassador to El Salvador from 1979 to 1981, I was called to testify at the trial. Copies of the telegrams I sent as ambassador during this period were projected onto a large screen to allow the judge and jury to read them. These diplomatic communications, declassified for the trial, described my efforts to persuade García and Vides Casanova to put an end to the military death squads. I told the court that the generals' refusal to root out the worst offenders in the security forces had led directly to the escalation of violence, the deaths of as many as sixty-five thousand civilians, including the American churchwomen, and the intensification of El Salvador's civil war.

In these telegrams, I further described my efforts to impress on García, Vides Casanova, and other high-ranking Salvadoran military that their failure to curb official violence not only brought shame on the Salvadoran military and its partner, the United States, but constituted a serious threat to the stability of the government then led by civilian reformer José Napoleon Duarte.

In one telegram, I describe the Alice-in-Wonderland quality of a meeting with García in which I tried to persuade him to cleanse the security forces of their worst offenders. This plea was met with his claim that the military was innocent of any abuses. When I pressed him, García finally admitted that perhaps 1 percent of his troops might be involved in death squads. I then pointed out that with 16,000 men under arms that meant that, at a minimum, 160 uniformed criminals were murdering civilians with total impunity. Despite his admission, García refused to make any commitment to take action against the soldiers.

In a later cable, I wrote, "García admitted that the excesses were grave and said that he had a good idea who was responsible." The telegram goes on to say that García "was sure that there were individual cases of security force participation in death squads." Robert Montgomery, lead counsel for the families of the murdered churchwomen, bore down on these telegrams because they spoke to the issue of command responsibility (the legal doctrine under which the generals had been charged), that is, that the generals knew about the abuses and did nothing to stop them. At the trial, I affirmed that the Salvadoran military had a hierarchical structure and that if the defendants "gave the explicit order to stop the killing, then it would stop." Of course neither García nor Vides Casanova ever gave such an order.

García and Vides Casanova pleaded innocent to the charges, stressing that the Reagan and Bush administrations would not have supported the Salvadoran army had they not been carrying out U.S. policy successfully. Attorney Kurt Klaus, representing García and Vides Casanova, rested the generals' defense on the theory "that these men were doing basically what the U.S. government wanted them to do." It was a telling point.



Robert E. White, *a former United States ambassador to El Salvador and Paraguay, is president of the Center for International Policy.*

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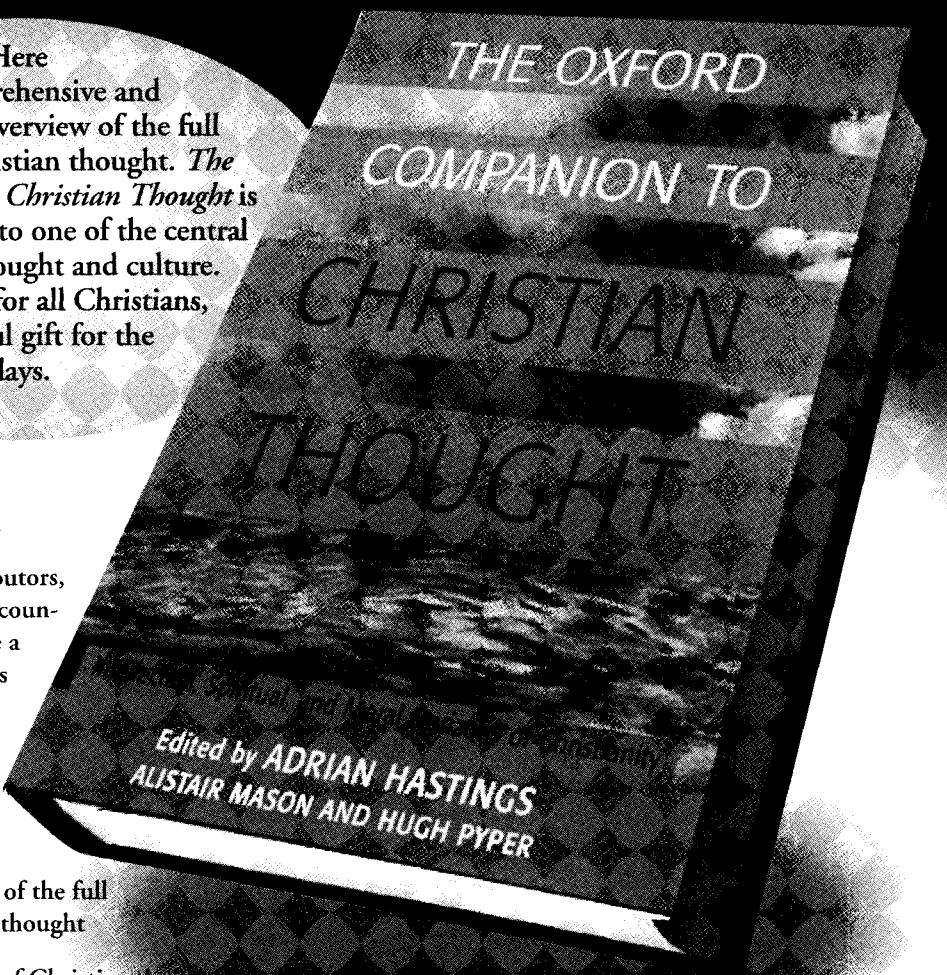

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Immediately following the 1980 U.S. election, members of the Reagan transition team traveled to El Salvador and spoke to key figures in the Salvadoran power structure, reassuring them that on inauguration day, January 20, 1981, military aid would flow again, free of the human-rights conditions imposed by the Carter administration. The Salvadoran military understood this as a go-ahead signal and unleashed a torrent of violence. Hundreds of ordinary Salvadorans were killed, and for the first time American citizens were targeted.

In the short period of ten weeks between the U.S. election in November and the inauguration of Ronald Reagan, in addition to the American missionary women, the Salvadoran security forces killed Marcial Serrano, a Salvadoran priest; destroyed the Catholic radio station WSAX; tortured and assassinated seven leaders of the moderate, nonviolent Democratic Revolutionary Front; killed freelance American journalist John Sullivan; and assassinated the director of the government's land reform agency, José Rodolfo Viera, and two American advisers from the American Institute of Free Labor Development, Michael Hammer and Mark Pearlman.

Notwithstanding my numerous reports to the State Department making it clear that the Salvadoran military killed the churchwomen and that García, Vides Casanova, and other members of the military high command were stonewalling the investigation, I received a telephone call in mid-January from the department's acting assistant secretary for inter-American affairs, John Bushnell, saying that Secretary of State-designate Alexander Haig wanted me to file a report assuring him that the Salvadoran military were "making progress on the nuns' case." After a barbed conversation with Bushnell, I wrote a telegram that said, "I will have no part of any cover-up. All the evidence we have, and it has been reported fully, is that the Salvadoran government has made no serious effort to investigate the killings of the murdered American churchwomen."

In late January, Haig, now secretary of state, told the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, "I would like to suggest to you that some of the investigations would lead me to believe that perhaps the vehicle that the nuns were riding in may have tried to run a roadblock or may have accidentally been perceived to have been doing so, and there may have been an exchange of gunfire."

This was what the Salvadoran officers had been waiting to hear—a high-ranking U.S. official who would publicly take their side even if it meant misrepresenting the facts. This confirmed what had already been communicated during the election campaign and transition period. The Salvadoran military knew that there were no "investigative reports" to justify Haig's statement. Embassy cables, photographs, and eyewitnesses unanimously testified to the gangland-style executions of the churchwomen.

Haig was putting into practice the guidelines set down in a January 24, 1981 meeting of Reagan's National Security Council:

> Our support for the [Salvadoran] government has been highly conditional with military assistance expressly turned on and off to press the military to control violence from within itself and from the Right and to meet specific concerns such as the investigation of the murders of the four American churchwomen. This has strained our relationship with the all-important military leadership and raised doubts as to the firmness and reliability of our commitment to support the government. Such doubts urgently need to be resolved.

Translated into plain English this meant that regardless of how many civilians the Salvadoran security forces killed, U.S. military aid would not be affected, but would flow in ever-increasing amounts.

Obviously the jury in the trial of García and Vides Casanova was offered a different and opposing view by the defense: times were chaotic and the generals had done their best, they said. The proof that they had done their best? Had not General García received letters of commendation from high U.S. officials, including the Legion of Merit, the highest honor our government can bestow on a foreign dignitary? Had not General Vides Casanova also received the Legion of Merit and a letter of commendation from President Reagan? And finally, Ambassador Edwin Corr, envoy to El Salvador more than four years after these events (1985–88), appeared as a character witness for Vides Casanova, testifying that the former minister of defense "made a tremendous contribution to the country and to the reduction of human-rights abuses."

The doctrine of command responsibility is new to the U.S. judicial system; this is the first case ever brought under its rule. The judge told the jury that "a military commander is obligated, under international law and United States law, to take appropriate measures within his power to control the troops under his command and prevent their committing torture and extra-judicial killing."

It is hard to believe that the preponderance of evidence did not persuade the jury to convict the generals. For almost two weeks, the ten jurors received a crash course on El Salvador during the 1980s, when torture, murder, and state terror killed sixty-five thousand civilians and drove more than a million terrified poor people to the United States. After the verdict, the foreman of the jury said, "We're talking about control, enough to control what they did as it was presented to us at a chaotic time and conflict. There was no way we could determine these two guys could control all events happening with their troops."

Of course, if the jurors had found García and Vides Casanova guilty they would be, at the same time, finding the Reagan administration guilty of aiding and abetting the criminal acts of the Salvadoran military. It may be that the members of the jury—like most Americans—still have faith in their government. The jury may have found the Salvadoran generals innocent because its members were also finding their own country not guilty. □

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Richard Alleva

QUADRANTS & QUALITY

Why Hollywood feeds kids schlock

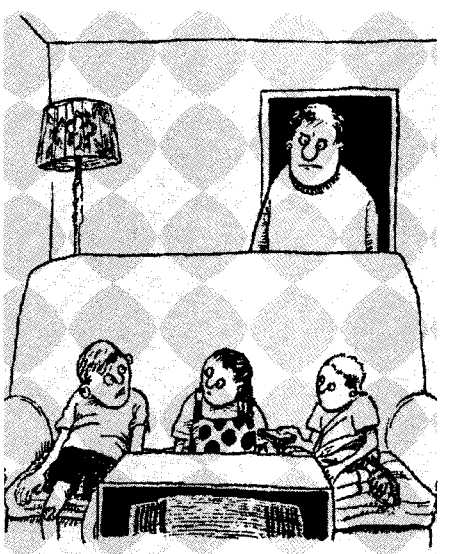
Remember the short-lived hullabaloo sparked off by the Federal Trade Commission's report that film studios were previewing violent R-rated films to children? Coming as it did in the midst of a presidential campaign, the news evoked the censure of political figures, notably Joe Lieberman and Lynn Cheney, who made threatening noises about keeping movie executives on short leashes.

Of course, it felt good to see Hollywood hustlers exposed as hypocrites like those cigarette manufacturers caught prevaricating in congressional hearings. But it is precisely when you compare the moral trespass of the movie "suits" with that of the tobacco "suits" that you begin to see the moral intricacy of the movie problem. The cigarette people were deliberately aiming their marketing strategies at children in the hope of turning them into addicts, young addicts who would become older addicts (some of them never very much older, alas). Not much ambiguity there. Cigarettes kill. Do movies?

Yes, say the American Medical Association, the American Psychological Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the National Institute of Mental Health, some movies are a direct stimulus to violent behavior. Can all these impressively titled groups be wrong? Of course, answers the writer Richard Rhodes in his *New York Times* op-ed piece of September 7, "Hollow Claims about Fantasy Violence." He avers that mock violence is actually irrelevant compared to the way young psyches are brutalized by real violence "learned in personal violent encounters, beginning with the brutalization of children by their parents or their peers." And Andrew Sullivan (*New Republic*, October 2) went further. Citing statistics that point to a drop in under-eighteen violence, he suggests that "the rise of a bawdy, violent popular culture is actually linked to the decline in crime and dysfunction among the young...a fourteen-year-old consumed with murdering mythic gods on his PlayStation is not on a street corner making trouble; he's taking out his aggression on a monitor."

Richard Rhodes's argument strikes me as unexceptionable: yes, real violence must warp kids in ways that pretend violence cannot even begin to, and any junior hooliganism ignited by a film or video game was probably begging to be ignited by something. Any match will do for some fuses.

But I wonder about Andrew Sullivan's theory. Movies, more than TV or video games, more vividly stir the senses than they ever did in the past, due to recording and projecting inventions that have made recent movies gaudier, faster, louder, and certainly more wrenching in the imagery of violence, desire, and degradation. Sullivan would probably agree and might say that this is precisely what makes Hollywood junk beneficially purgative. And he would be right in regard to most normal young viewers, who have little blood lust raging within them and who take most violent movies for nothing more than fun.



"I anticipate a coup by an old hardliner and loss of democratic remote control."

But even if pop entertainment purges some kids of violence, does it purge other feelings as well? Feelings that shouldn't be purged? It may not matter to society at large if many young people prefer movie or computer schlock to Marcel Proust, but surely it does matter if courtesy becomes rare, if all gallantry and tenderness are drained out of sexual desire, if it's no longer recognized that some human situations pivot on nuance and not on sensation. Certainly, Sullivan is right that most fourteen-year-olds won't turn criminal while their imaginations are consumed with the murder of mythic gods, but this is the sort of social strategy usually welcomed by Roman emperors, not intellectuals writing in a free, democratic society. Give 'em bread and circuses, Sullivan seems to be saying, so they won't make havoc in the streets.

I'm sure that Sullivan, a sensitive and tough-minded commentator, wants the youngster glutted on movie gore and video games to mature, go to college, read better books, think weightier thoughts, but by the time a teenager reaches the age of eighteen, haven't the din of computer combat and rap music and the hectic imagery of slasher movies and MTV taken a certain toll? To cope with the difficult imagery of Shakespeare or the tricky rhythms of Henry James requires a certain unjangled sensibility, and adolescents are normally jangled enough without the music and movie industries aggravating the nerviness. If you subsist on recreational drugs for long, it's difficult to reacquire a taste for food. I'd certainly welcome a world in which fewer young lives are lost, but I'd also like it to be a world in which fewer young minds are lost.

But, if I'm right, let me quickly qualify my argument. The younger the sensibility, the more easily it's damaged, and I would be willing to bet that more kids have been psychologically damaged, or at least coarsened, by G- and PG-rated

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movies and TV kid shows before reaching the age of ten than by R-rated mock violence seen in early adolescence.

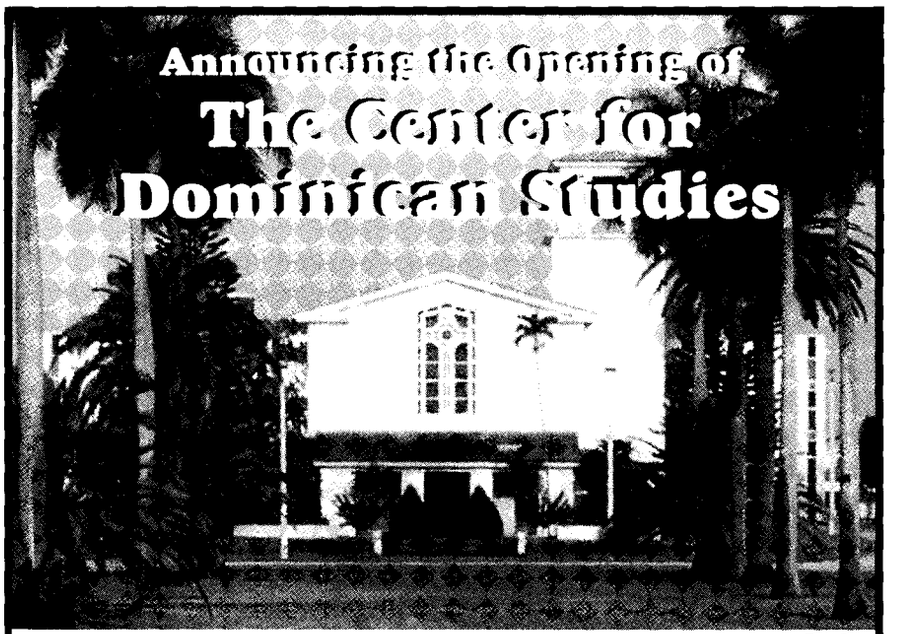
To be sure, there are no children's movies or shows that advocate bloodletting or devil worship or even handgun ownership or smoking. But the plots of most "family movies" are threads on which a string of visual and aural explosions and smirky jokes are strung. There certainly have been superior kid flicks in recent years, such as *Hercules, The Iron Giant, Toy Story I* and *II*, and, best of all, *Chicken Run* (one of the high points of Western civilization), but I have to say that the best as well as the worst—*The Rugrats Movie* (far inferior to the clever TV show), *The Little Vampire, Snow Day*, etc.—all seem to be based on scripts carefully engineered to eliminate all moments of hush and awe, of poignancy, of anything life-sized, and supply instead a nonstop wiseass, media-hip, basically cynical comedy that I sometimes relish (raised as I was on "Saturday Night Live") but that I wish didn't pervade every movie to which I dare take my nine-year-old. (All these films supply at least one maudlin scene in which one character "opens up" and "shares" with another, and I think this is when most kids, rightly, run up the aisles for popcorn.) The very last movie for children that had a large sense of humanity and a bit of awe for the mysteriousness of the human condition was *The Indian in the Cupboard*, and that was made in 1995! And before *Indian* was the even better *Black Stallion*, released in 1980. More recently, the mildly good *Stuart Little* seemed to be trying for something humane in its first half, then shucked off E.B. White's concluding quest for his rodent-boy hero in favor of the usual series of chases and Dolby-enhanced collisions and explosions that the world of kid flicks has in common with the action and horror movies that teenagers see.

And we shouldn't be surprised that children's movies have a lot in common with R-rated violent or comically gross films. After all, they're all in the same quadrant.

All in the same what?

John Travolta and Nora Ephron, respectively the star and director of *Lucky Numbers*, were hyping their movie on Jay Leno's "Tonight Show" at the end of October. While lamenting the difficulties of getting studio support for any script without instant youth appeal, Travolta remarked that most studio honchos pigeonhole a project in one of the following "quadrants" before deciding whether or not to fork over the dough: young males, young females, older males, older females. "Oh? And who are in the older quadrants?" asked Leno. "Forty and up?" Ephron and Travolta shot each other a split-second glance of amusement and commiseration before the actor answered that twenty-five was the dividing line. Leno's impressive jaw dropped and so did mine.

But once we have adjusted to the way movie executives think, can we really be surprised that some violent R-rated movies got marketed to the young? Within the young-male quadrant (which is the one that brings in the big profits), ratings may vary from movie to movie but the



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texture is constant. When din and bang and smirk and explosions are always the main items on the bill of fare, who is going to notice the presence of a little extra blood, a few obscene words, a couple of mutilated corpses? Certainly not the young parents I have seen carrying their two-year-olds into movies like *The Cell* and *The Matrix*. To the movie honchos, the kiddie audience for the coarse, witless *Snow Day* (PG) is just a few years away from being the audience for the sensationalism of *The Fifth Element* (R). They're both in the same quadrant.

'Twas not always so. Just as in the Victorian era when there were adult novels that you read aloud to the entire family (Dickens, Thackeray), so the majority of movies before the eighties were aimed primarily at adults but could be seen by children with profit. Pauline Kael said it best in her 1968 article, "Movies for Young Children": "it's possible, too, that this kind of movie [she had mentioned *National Velvet*, *The African Queen*, and *Ivanhoe*, only the first of which had been made specifically for kids—with its excitements and plot anticipations] may help children develop the story sense, that sense of narrative structure which is...so necessary for the enjoyment of the traditional English novel, and which may even be necessary for a sense of history."

True, such adult films are in short supply nowadays, but they still exist. You could have taken your ten-year-olds (and up) to see *The Sixth Sense*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Ulee's Gold*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, *Amistad*, *The Truman Show*, etc., and now you can rent the videos. Yes, some of these movies contain violence and sex and coarse language, but would you rather have kids encounter adult content in these morally lucid films or in *The Cell* or *There's Something about Mary*? Stuck in the G-rated movie ghetto, children will not develop a taste for classic novels or a sense of history from Disney's lunkheaded, politically correct *Hunchback of Notre Dame* or the saccharine, incoherent *Anastasia*. Courage, my fellow media pawns. The world of moviemaking is still wide and various, and you and your children can escape from the quadrants. □

EXHIBIT

Elizabeth Kirkland Cahill

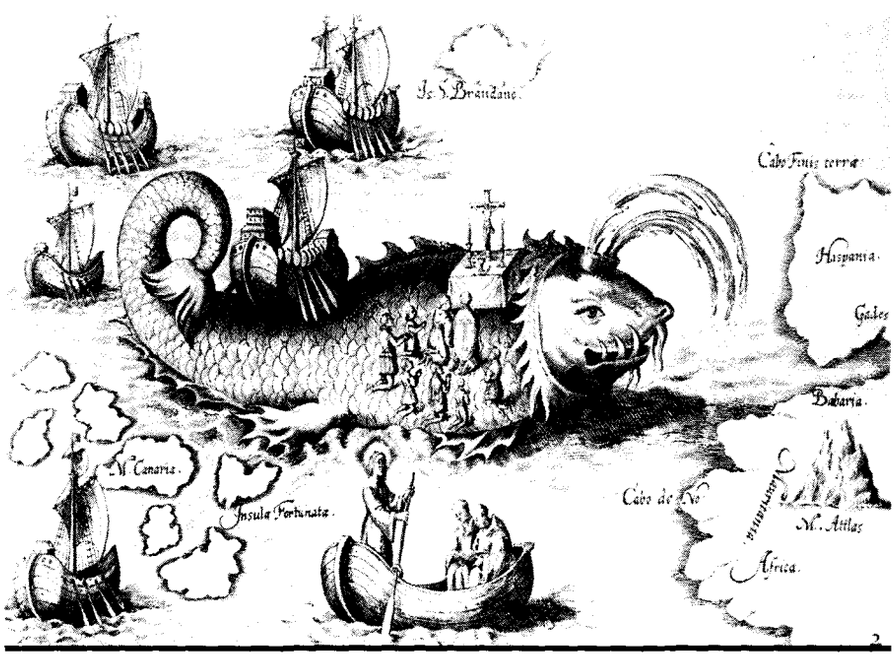
NOWHERE IS EVERWHERE

Utopia at the New York Public Library

Were Sir Thomas More (1478–1535) to wander into the New York Public Library exhibit, "Utopia: The Search for the Ideal Society in the Western World," he would no doubt be astonished at what he hath wrought. More's "splendid little book, no less instructive than entertaining," as the description on the title page reads, not only bequeathed the term "utopia" to future generations, but also initiated a flourishing literary genre populated by the likes of Jonathan Swift and Ray Bradbury, and influenced historical events and political movements all the way from the American Revolution to Marxism to 1950s urban planning to the Internet. Or so the library would have it in its exhaustive, cerebral new exhibit, on view through January 27, 2001.

A collaboration with the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (where a similar version was on view this summer), this show boasts hundreds of books, manuscripts, etchings, architectural renderings, posters, maps, photographs, and album covers. It is rich fare, not quickly or easily digested. A warning: Do not attempt this in your lunch hour.

The exhibit states its intentions in its entrance tableau: two early printed versions of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, open to the description of the Golden Age, stand against a backdrop of modern Plexiglas stairway bookshelves containing contemporary paperback versions of utopian works published between 1516 and the present. Actually, seven hundred years of Western history are under consideration here, and the exhibit stretches the definition of "utopia" so much that the visitor may be forgiven for wondering where the limits fall in an exhibit that includes a manuscript of Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, a first edition of *Robinson Crusoe* (is a solitary utopia possible?), and record album covers from the 1960s. The show is a great advertisement for the library's magnificent collections, but as a clearly defined treat-



One that got away

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ment of the search for utopia, it comes up a bit short, or more accurately, a bit long. The advantage of this approach is that there is probably something here for just about everyone.

Though More gets credit for entering the term into the lexicon of Western cultural history, the seeds of utopia existed in ancient and biblical sources, where the perfect world was known variously as the Golden Age, the New Jerusalem, the Land of Cockaigne, and, of course, the Garden of Eden. Illustrations of these constitute the first section of the exhibition, and there are many treasures here. I particularly liked the scene depicted in a fifteenth-century Franco-Flemish Book of Hours showing the expulsion from the Garden. A stooping, dispirited Adam and a wistful Eve walk slowly through a lush garden with gravid fruit trees and a profusion of animals, as a flaming red cherub, his sword raised, glowers against a possible return. Exquisite in color and detail, it conveys the poignancy of paradise lost.

If paradise had been lost, then surely it could be found, and medieval Christian writers developed the narrative of the quest for the perfect world to a high art. A delightful example of this literary form occurs in the *Navigatio* of Saint Brendan. A sixth-century Irish monk, Brendan made a seven-year sea voyage around the isles of Ireland in search of paradise. His travels were circular, he and his companions returning each year to celebrate the Easter vigil on the back of an enormous fish, Jasconius. The fanciful depiction of this celebration (in a seventeenth-century manuscript recounting the quest) features a fish with human eyes bearing an altar and several monks on its scaly back.

Thomas More gave these various traditions a local habitation and a name in his 1516 volume describing the island of Utopia, a society that lay "beyond the equator" and was characterized by justice, rational conduct, and economic equality. On view are various first editions of *Utopia* (the original in Latin, as well as later English and French versions). One is struck by the impact that such a slim volume, in quarto, has had on the world. Among the items flanking these printed texts are eighteenth-century etchings which give amusing incarnation to More's social pragmatism. For example, when More's Utopians sought a mate, they arranged for the prospective bride and groom to evaluate each other unclothed—professing surprise at how careless the rest of the world is about entering such an undertaking sight unseen. The etching "How engagements are made in Utopia," shows a bare and buxom female, draped discreetly where it mattered, and a similarly unclad and solidly fleshed male, coolly sizing each other up. It is as practical a mating dance as can be imagined.

The publication of *Utopia* coincided with an unprecedented wave of geographic exploration. Europeans viewed the New World as a tabula rasa on which they could project their own images of a perfect society. A plenitude of maps and engravings documents these commonly distorted perspectives and traces the development of a more accurate understanding of the newfound lands. A 1540 map drawn by the great cartographer Sebastian Munster illustrates both tenden-

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cies: while it is one of the earliest maps to show the Americas as a separate continent, it also indicates the presence of cannibals in South America by depicting a human leg roasting on a bonfire.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, utopia began to leave the realm of the abstract for everyday life, by way of political revolutions (the American and the French) and social movements. The section of the exhibit which details some of these events is the area of greatest exchange with the Bibliothèque Nationale, and seems accordingly to be skewed toward things French—although clearly France was the locus of much utopian activity during this time. With the utopian socialist movements of early nineteenth-century France, for example, reformers such as Charles Fourier and Henri de Saint-Simon sought a new way of life based on the abolition of private property and the creation of self-contained communities. An interesting piece here is the vest worn by Barthélemy Enfantin, a prominent Saint-Simonian. A typical item of clothing for the members of the community, this particular one is white (signifying love) and red (signifying work). It buttons up in the back, emphasizing fraternity and mutual dependence, and has the member's name emblazoned across the front—in this case, Enfantin's title, LE PÈRE—to represent individual responsibility.

By this point, the library's Gottesman Hall is bursting at the seams and the exhibit moves up two floors to the Edna Barnes Salomon Room for a look at the twentieth century. It is the largest segment of the show and one in which the broad definition of utopia feels most strained. At the same time, some truly remarkable materials illuminate the disastrous consequences of more recent attempts to engineer perfection. It becomes painfully clear that the limits of utopia are the limits of human nature, and that any attempts to construct a world governed on rational principles—or any other monolithic theory—will run up against greed, self-interest, and power.

Nowhere is this better illustrated than in two of the most ill-fated political experiments of the twentieth century, Nazism and Soviet Communism. One side of an exhibition case displays various Nazi propaganda tools. There is, for example, a cigarette-card album (similar to a baseball-card album) in which Germans could paste pictures of smiling blond children and stalwart mothers, representations of ideal families in Hitler's perfect Aryan society. And on the other side of the case are photographs and etchings of actual Nazi atrocities in Poland, showing tortured bodies, hanging bodies, bodies in agony.

Soviet propaganda and its dark underside are on parade, too. An entire wall features black-and-white photographs from Stalin's glossy magazine, *USSR in Construction*, published in several languages (including English) from 1930 to 1941. Designed to proclaim Russia's entrance onto the world stage as a major industrial power, the magazine features photographs of workers discovering the "poetry of labor," the "romance of construction work." There is a photograph of an avuncular Stalin hugging a female worker at an Armenian textile mill. The brightly colored Soviet propaganda posters show heroically proportioned women and muscle-bound men busily engaged in acts of productivity for the state. My favorite, titled "May 1, 1920," has a family striding purposefully, scythes and axes in hand, flags waving, chests thrust forward. Juxtaposed with these images are films and photographs of Soviet labor camps.

The American visitor may leave the exhibit—particularly in this curious election year—pondering what has become of the search for utopia. Of course perfection is unattainable (a fact More acknowledged in titling his work, which, through a pun on its Greek roots, means both "good place" and "no place"), but merely to engage in the quest seems something of a moral choice. Wrapped in the heavy mantle of materialism, captivated by the illusion of personal autonomy, do we even bother any longer to dream of a perfect society? The exhibit considers the possibility of a "cybertopia" in a Web site called Metaworlds. But there is a clue elsewhere, in one of the single most riveting items in the exhibit.

As you round a corner in Gottesman, you see them: two tall Plexiglas tubes, the documents inside seemingly suspended in midair. A light goes on, illuminating the strong, clear handwriting of Thomas Jefferson. It is a fair copy of the Declaration of Independence, one of three surviving copies penned by the optimistic visionary himself. No matter how many times you have seen it in a textbook, to view the document itself is profoundly moving, emblematic of the best the exhibit has to offer.

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with inherent and inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." While these words have not brought about utopia, they do serve as a salutary reminder of principle to those who carry the quest for utopia forward into the twenty-first century. □

Elizabeth Kirkland Cahill *is co-author, with Joseph Papp, of* Shakespeare Alive! *(Bantam).*

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Critics' choices for Christmas

Peggy Ellsberg

Peggy Ellsberg teaches English at Barnard College.

Linda Gordon's *The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction* (Harvard, $29.95, 456 pp.), tells the story of a few days—October 1 to 4, 1904—in the lives of forty Irish orphans, and the seven nuns from the New York Foundling Hospital who accompanied them on the train from Grand Central Station to the mining town of Clifton-Morenci, Arizona. At Clifton, the nuns dressed the babies in new clothes, cuddled them one last time, and delivered them with some emotion into the arms of forty adoptive mothers waiting on the platform. The adoptions had been arranged by the hospital and Father Constant Mandin of Clifton. All forty homes had been checked out for cleanliness, good order, and above all, devout Catholicism.

Gordon's account takes place in six scenes, with historical interludes between them. Her narrative voice is enticing, and her descriptions vivid. How could so small a parish yield so large a number of Catholic homes eager to adopt babies? Gordon tells us that childlessness was common in Clifton-Morenci, partly because of the poisonous fumes wafting from the mines, associated with an unusually high number of miscarriages, and partly because of infant mortality. "Many Clifton-Morenci families were childless—30 percent of the white and 18 percent of the Mexican—and almost certainly not by choice."

The happy consensus of forty Irish Catholic babies arriving from the Foundling Hospital in New York to fill the clean, waiting homes of Mexican Catholics in Arizona was not destined to last, however. Late on the night of October 2, 1904, in a drenching rain, an armed Anglo posse went door to door, kidnapping the orphans and threatening the New York nuns and Father Mandin with lynching. A riot ensued.

The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction, which won the prestigious Bancroft Prize for American History, has been widely reviewed in the past year, with every review emphasizing the racism of the Anglos who thought it a fate worse than death for "white" babies to be cared for by "Mexican" mothers. Some reviewers also noted that Gordon's story addresses women's issues. Indeed, Gordon treats the Sisters of Charity reverently, noting precocious "feminism": "They indulged far less than the Protestants in characterizing single mothers as 'fallen.' Instead, the sister dedicated themselves to rescuing poor mothers, by providing opportunities for them...and by offering a chance to surrender a child only temporarily."

Most striking for me, though, is Gordon's recognition of Catholicism as a marker of joint identity among immigrant groups. In arranging the adoptions by parishioners in Arizona, authorities in New York took impeccable care that the new homes be Catholic. Who cared if they were Mexican? Roman Catholics in New York in 1904—whether Irish or Polish or Italian—were not classified as "white" anyway. Whiteness, a subject of study and consideration in recent years, is an artificial construction, a designation pertaining more to class than to gradations of color. But in Arizona, the sociology was different: the underclass was Mexican before it was Catholic, and thus the mixing of ethnicities troubled the dominant culture, in this case, Arizona Anglos.

The story does not end happily for the Mexican Catholics. The Catholic church sued, all the way to the Supreme Court, to get the babies back, and lost. This book provides a gripping piece of a puzzled history not only of American racism, but of the Catholic experience of it.

In Sheri Holman's *The Dress Lodger* (Atlantic Monthly Press, $24, 291 pp.) the time is the 1830s; the place is Sunderland, a seaside town in northern England; the smells and sounds are poverty, squalor, and mass death; the tone is Dickens on Dexedrine. The big news is cholera, which has come to town by way of a boat. Gustine, the fifteen-year-old heroine of this historically precise novel, embodies most of the classical virtues. She works all day at "the pottery" hefting huge plinths of wet clay. She lodges at the filthy and overcrowded Labor in Vain, where, in return for her nest of straw to sleep on, she spends her evenings as a prostitute. Her landlord is a pimp. He compels

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her to use a fancy blue dress (hence the title of the book) to attract clients, and sets a mutilated hag, named simply "The Eye," to tail her on her nightly beat. Gustine is intelligent and uncomplaining, dedicating her ceaseless labors to support her beloved infant son.

Fate and plot connect Gustine with Dr. Harry Chiver, a research surgeon short on cadavers. He resorts to the ghoulish practice of robbing graves. He has been accused of murdering beggars to dissect their bodies. Harry's problem will soon vanish, because cholera will yield more corpses than he needs. One night at the theater a man who was sitting beside Eustine "vomited quietly into his cap." Death will come within hours for this victim of *cholera morbis*. But first, the poor thing must endure violent convulsions: "In great heaving waves the old hero would vomit basinfuls of gruelly white flocculent matter, the color of soap in hard water." Finally, the patient turns cold and blue. Soon bodily effluvia and contaminated clothing are everywhere in Sunderland, and so is the epidemic.

Now you might find my claim perplexing after that introduction, but *The Dress Lodger* is certainly the best novel I read this year, and for many years before. Forgive the cliché, but I could not put it down. Holman's prose shivers with intellectual brilliance—fast, fuguing, sharp as glass. The end of the book is absolutely breathtaking (do not peek!), and brimming with quiet redemption.

Two years ago I read Alain de Botton's *How Proust Can Change Your Life*, and feel it did change my life, and so I hastened to buy his *Consolations of Philosophy* (Pantheon, $22, 265 pp.) the minute it appeared. It is exquisite and delightful.

The author is chair of the Department of Philosophy at the University of London, and yet—or thus—he writes about the griefs that human flesh is heir to (unpopularity, poverty, frustration, for example) and how philosophers (Socrates, Seneca, Montaigne, for example) can cure or at least console them. So if you have always wanted to understand difficult philosophy but dreaded the effort it would entail, this is the book for you. □

Robert Schmuhl

Robert Schmuhl is professor of American Studies and director of the John W. Gallivan Program in Journalism, Ethics & Democracy at the University of Notre Dame. His most recent book, Indecent Liberties *(University of Notre Dame Press), appeared earlier this year.*

Advancing age or acute aversion to futuristic fairy tales of millennial musing prompts the indulgence of a long look back. Three very different books, all published in 2000, animate the past with such felicity and force that readers will welcome them for years to come.

Seamus Heaney's verse translation of *Beowulf* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, $25, 220 pp.) succeeds on so many levels it is no wonder this thousand-year-old work came back to life as a worldwide bestseller. The 1995 Nobel laureate in literature, Heaney makes the Anglo-Saxon classic of heroism and moral nobility an accessible, contemporary page turner. Even though the narrative is well known—Beowulf vanquishes Grendel and Grendel's mother before losing his own life slaying a dragon—Heaney's rendition infuses a poetic majesty into familiar proceedings.

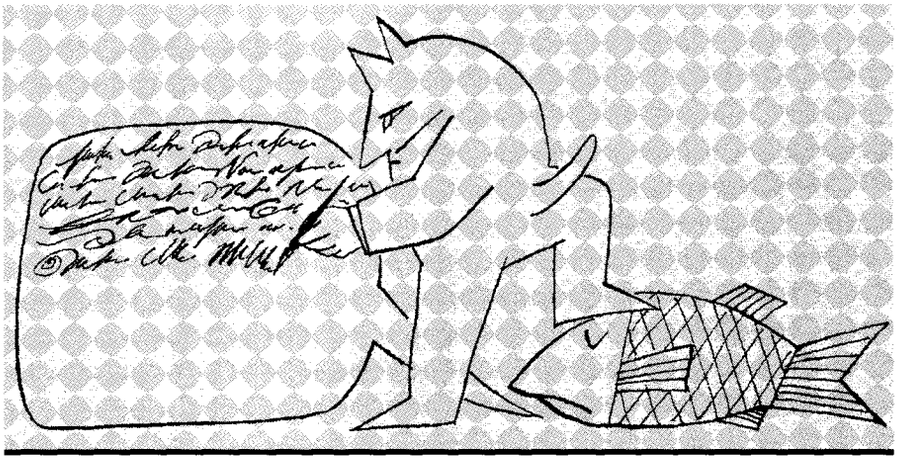
This *Beowulf* is a cross-cultural tour de force. An Old English poem set in Scandinavia is now a work of modern English by an artist with an Irish sensibility. Born in Northern Ireland and currently living in the Republic, Heaney notes in his introduction, "where a local Ulster word seemed either poetically or historically right, I felt free to use it"—adding an up-to-the-moment political dimension to this translation.

Vivid phrasing propels the poem, yet the temptation is to tarry instead of moving to the next adventure. We read that "reavers from hell roam on their errands," or that someone "wintered into wisdom," or that "Fate goes ever as fate must."

Beyond the linguistic virtuosity, *Beowulf* is an old-fashioned, albeit timeless, tale of good defeating evil, of heroism demanding courage, and of God's will being done. Yes, the valiant warrior and virtuous leader dies. But, thanks to Heaney's artistic taxidermy, the story and all it symbolizes will endure well into the new millennium.

Closer to home—and with its depiction of heroic leadership strikingly more ambiguous—Adam Cohen and Elizabeth Taylor in *American Pharaoh* (Little, Brown, $26.95, 614 pp.) portray, in the words of their subtitle, *Mayor Richard J. Daley: His Battle for Chicago and the Nation*. Impeccable research and impressive contextualization give this biography a muscular command mirroring its subject.

Daley, who won six mayoral elections (1955 through 1975) and ruled twenty-one years, was visionary about revitalizing areas of his city and practical to the point of reporting potholes for repair. Similar to Willie Stark in Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men*, Daley is a dictatorial Democrat, more concerned with amassing (in Chicago pa-



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tois) "clout" than agonizing over what's right or wrong.

Called by the authors "a gregarious loner, acquainted with thousands of people but close to almost none," Daley ran his political machine with frightening efficiency that produced results, especially for Chicago's business elite and middle classes. Poorer neighborhoods, often populated by minorities, had less priority, suffering the consequences.

With Pharaonic force, Daley made sure monuments were built to mark his time—O'Hare International Airport, Sears Tower, the Civic Center, McCormick Place, the Dan Ryan Expressway, to name a few. As political boss of the Cook County Democratic Party, he also constructed election slates to strengthen his position. Cerebral liberal Paul Douglas was chosen to run for the Senate because Daley saw "no harm in selecting a reformer for an office like U.S. senator, since it was not a position that carried a significant number of patronage jobs with it."

Richard J. Daley is a lasting stereotype of a big-city pol and power broker of the twentieth century. *American Pharaoh* probes beyond this stereotype to provide a three-dimensional portrait that itself will last.

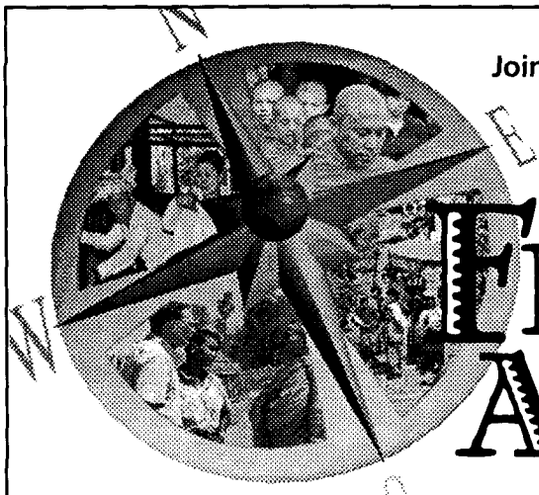
Finally—and for a changeup—*Red Smith on Baseball* (Ivan R. Dee, $24.95, 365 pp.) proves that journalism at its best can occupy shelf space in the literature department. In 167 columns written between 1941 and 1981, Smith not only elevates news writing but also affirms his belief: "Baseball is dull only to dull minds."

The descriptions of long-ago games and players crackle with such life and immediacy that prior knowledge of the subjects doesn't matter. What counts is the prose of rare originality and playful pertinence—as arresting today as when it appeared in a next-day column for the *New York Herald Tribune* or the *New York Times*.

An infielder is "a compact little bundle of distilled malice." A homer clears the fence "on a line as flat as old beer." An outfielder jumps to make a catch and "stayed aloft so long he looked like an empty uniform hanging in its locker." A general manager "smiled with the warmth of a brave man having splinters thrust under his fingernails." Brawls among players lack real danger because "nobody has thrown a punch that would break the Mother Superior's glasses."

Predictably, Smith's at the top of his game rendering the sport's most dramatic moments. His account of Bobby Thompson's pennant-winning home run for the New York Giants in 1951 begins: "Now it is done. Now the story ends. And there is no way to tell it. The art of fiction is dead. Reality has strangled invention. Only the utterly impossible, the inexpressibly fantastic, can ever be plausible again." Smith then devotes four paragraphs of keen observation to a drunk celebrating on the field—before getting down to business.

Smith died in 1982, but three volumes of his work have been published posthumously. The title of the last collection he himself assembled was *Strawberries in the Wintertime*. You might call *Beowulf*, *American Pharaoh*, and *Red Smith on Baseball* literary strawberries for this wintertime—and other seasons as well. □



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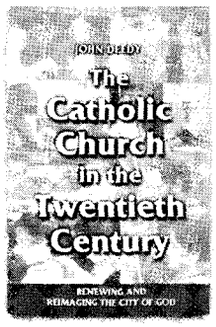

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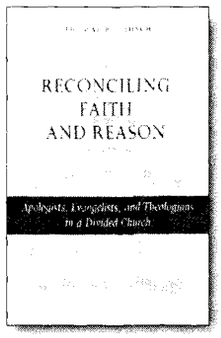

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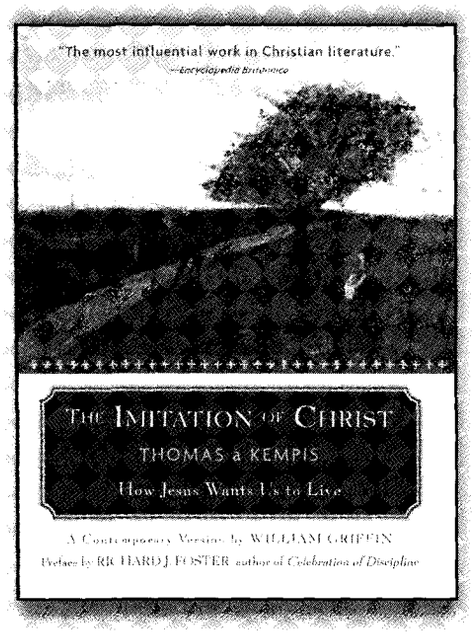
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Rembert G. Weakland

Rembert G. Weakland, O.S.B., is the archbishop of Milwaukee.

The six volumes in Susan Howatch's Starbridge series impressed me immensely, beginning with *Glittering Images*, through *Glamorous Powers, Ultimate Prizes, Scandalous Risks*, and *Mystical Paths*, to *Absolute Truths*. She has now written a new novel that could take its place among the best in that series, *The High Flier* (Knopf, $26, 512 pp.). Although Howatch continues to deal with parapsychological religious phenomena, such material is more integrated and more credible here.

As in the past, Howatch draws on the best in Anglican spirituality and mystical tradition, but this time adds a new sense of suspense and tenseness that was not evident in previous works. Since Hitchcock films are mentioned frequently in the book, I judge they have had an influence on how she has worked out the plot. Even the sexual aspects of the story seem more integral to the whole and are not adventitiously added for a prurient effect.

The plot follows the usual psychological and spiritual breakdown of Carter (Catriona) Graham and then works through her gradual rehabilitation. In so many ways the story could serve as a parody of modern culture and its criteria for success. It is Howatch at her best.

In 1990, as the Soviet Union was breaking up, I spent three weeks in Siberia, principally in Novosibirsk, with a trip up the Ob River to the old city of Tomsk. Pollution was evident everywhere. I had always been fascinated by Siberia and by the mixture of cultures that resulted because exiles were forced to reside there, either in the gulags or in the far-flung industrial centers. The cruelties perpetrated by Stalin on the human beings sent there have never been fully documented. I could uncover but a glimpse of those horrors in 1990 when the whole world was getting its first real view of these remote areas.

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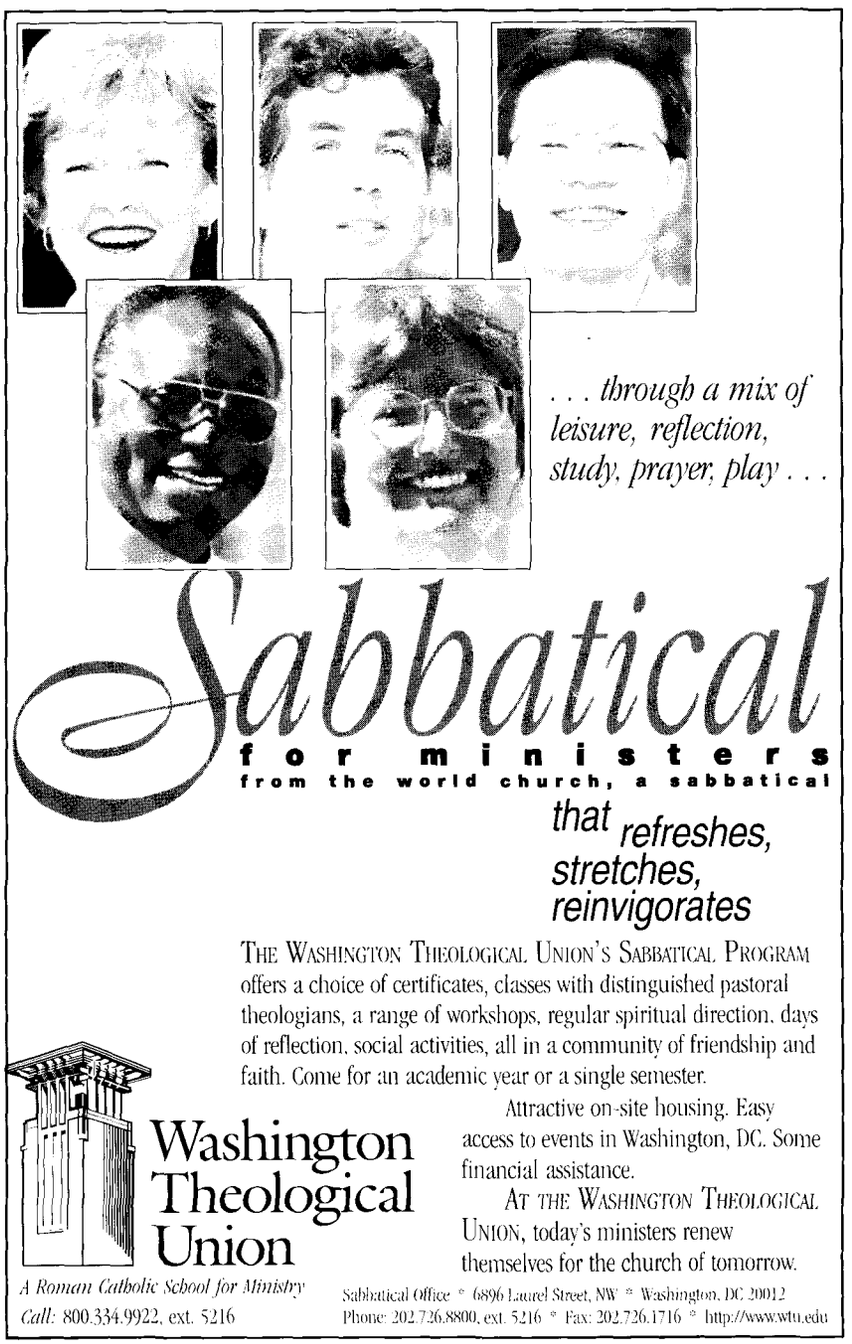
Now, all of this is well documented, with all the gruesome details of the punishments, early deaths, and exterminations inflicted on so many people during those years of isolation, in Colin Thubron's *In Siberia* (HarperCollins, $26, 288 pp.).

Although his trip took him from Yekaterinburg through Novosibirsk, Krasnoyarsk and Irkutsk to Khabarovsk, Thubron managed side treks by plane or boat up to the more remote and frigid regions of Vorkuta, Dudinka, and the area around Magadan. The details recorded in Thubron's elegant descriptions, from tundra to polluted rivers and lakes to cold mountain peaks, appear even more frightening to the reader than previously imagined. But the author is not just interested in the atrocities of the past. He includes vivid details about the current residents, their myths and beliefs, and the difficult lives they now face. He interviewed person after person and entered into their lives and aspirations—or lack thereof—today. The author's courage in making that solitary trip to uncover all these details struck me as a truly superb feat.

The Penguin Lives series has a fine knack of matching the right author with the perfect subject. To the long list that includes Edmund White on Marcel Proust, Peter Gay on Mozart, and Garry Wills on Saint Augustine appears *Joan of Arc* by Mary Gordon (Viking, $19.95, 176 pp.). At first I was not sure I needed to read another book on Joan of Arc. But the more I delved into this account, the more fascinated I became with the insights that only an author like Mary Gordon could bring to this complex and over-analyzed subject.

The short chapter on Joan's fierce defense of her virginity, "Virgin Body," contains some of Gordon's finest perceptions. She rightly begins that chapter with: "The display of Joan's charred body to gawking passersby in Rouen ranks high in the annals of brutal exposure. It is impossible to imagine a male hero for whom such a display would be required as a proof of any kind of authenticity." She goes on to show how integrity of body was of primary importance to Joan, a part of her very identity as well as her autonomy.

In addition to her own analysis of Joan's life, Gordon also gives a perceptive critique of others who have told the same story, from Dreyer and Shaw through Brecht and Peguy to Shakespeare, Schiller, and Verdi. Each age has remade Joan according to its image and likeness. Perhaps the complexity of the story with all its loose ends makes a definitive account impossible and lends itself to endless re-interpretation. I was glad that Mary Gordon tried her hand at it too. □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Philip Mueller

Philip Mueller is an assistant district attorney in Schenectady, New York.

When we were young my older brother kept us entertained by trying to kill me. He'd truss me up like Houdini, then drop me headfirst into the empty cast-iron bathtub, or con me into holding to my eye like a telescope the hose of the tank our grandfather used to gas up the tractor, then crank the pump handle. Later, we told these stories at holidays and learned of a family tradition: Our father and his three younger brothers, growing up on the farm, had played William Tell and other games of mayhem, always performed by the elder upon the next younger down the line. It never occurred to me that my early life as a victim might account for my career prosecuting violent felons, or that my brother might have become a teacher and coach in order to atone for, or perpetuate, his early years as a torturer. That is, until I read Alistair MacLeod's *No Great Mischief* (Norton, $24, 283 pp.), a family history told by an orthodontist who, as a boy growing up on Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, watched his wild older brother pull his own infected tooth by tying it to a horse.

MacLeod's novel (his first) is at once an intimate portrait and a sweeping saga, drawn in a series of flashbacks during the middle-aged narrator's visits to his now broken brother. Poignant moments between the brothers nest like Russian dolls within six generations of their clan and seven hundred years of Scottish Highlander history on two continents. The title, from British General James Wolfe's secret description of the Highlanders who fought under his command against the French in Quebec, and died with him in 1759 on the Plains of Abraham, only hints at the heartbreaking understatement that empowers this book: "They are hardy, intrepid, accustomed to a rough country, and no great mischief if they fall."

MacLeod's vivid and fully drawn characters are tied to and reflected in one another, their heroic and tragic ancestors, their harsh landscapes, and even the animals they live with. Quietly flowing beneath the surface is the narrator's need to reconcile his comfortable modern life with his wild heritage. The importance of this connection echoes in a cliché uttered by his grandmother in her dotage: "All of us are better when we're loved."

By contrast, Andre Dubus III has created, in *House of Sand and Fog* (Random House paperback, $14, 365 pp.), a modern tragedy of well-meaning people undone by rootlessness. Set in a beach town near San Francisco, it is told in the voices of protagonists who, in their respective isolations, have grown nearsighted; they see each grain of sand that chafes them but cannot see one another for the fog. A young woman estranged from her family by her addiction to drugs and alcohol loses her last connection when her late father's house is taken from her in a tax sale resulting from a bureaucratic error. The buyer is an expatriate Iranian, a former colonel in the Shah's air force who fled with his family from the revolution and sees in the house a chance to escape poverty and salvage his family's pride.

The catalyst in the war between them is a deputy sheriff who evicts the young woman. Detached from a loveless marriage, and discouraged by the perceived unfairness of the laws he enforces, he falls for the young woman like a drowning man grasping a buoy, and resolves to help her reclaim her home. In their worst moments, Dubus's characters physically experience their alienation as a floating over or detachment from their surroundings, and this may free them to do what they know they should not. Dubus quickens his characters with unique voices and exquisite sensibilities within their painfully limited range of vision. He does not judge them, leaving the reader free to do so. These are people I know very well, as does Dubus, who once worked as a corrections officer. Viewed up close, they are like each of us, a mix of saint and sinner, strength and weakness. But finally, they have lost a quality that restrains the rest of us from acting on our worst impulses, whether it is foresight or empathy or a shared conscience. All of us are better when we're loved.

"Did you realize that your subscription to 'Soldier of Fortune' is running out?"

From Dubus's people at war over a house, to a house at war with its inhabitants: Mark Danielewski's psychological horror story, *House of Leaves* (Pantheon, $20, 736 pp.), invoked for me the image, scary in itself, of Thomas Pynchon and Hunter Thompson collaborating on a cross between *The Birds*, *The Shining*, and *The Blair Witch Project*. Not for the faint-hearted or the impatient, this debut deserves attention as a technical tour de force by a young author of prodigious talent and energy. Multiple narrators, whose reliability and even existence are in doubt, tell interlocking layers of a story that begins with a young family moving into their new home, only to find that it is larger inside than out. As the spatial anomaly within the home grows in size and menace, the tale itself drives its tellers mad. Like the hapless dwellers, the reader is led into a dark labyrinth. We are left to wonder whether the horror of the house is a psychic reaction to the guilt and anger of its inhabitants, an expression of the despair of the narrators, or a metaphor for the death of the traditional novel (or just the world's longest shaggy-dog story). Although the book's byzantine structure dilutes the horror, it cleverly relies upon nothing but the familiar: We all live in houses. As I groped in the dark from my bed to the bathroom I found myself wondering if the distance from door to door might not have grown a bit. If Danielewski has not exhausted himself, watch out for his next book. □

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Tiina Aleman

Tiina Aleman is Commonweal*'s production editor.*

Being a lover of British fiction, my curiosity was piqued when the unfamiliar name of Hilary Mantel was mentioned with enthusiasm by *Commonweal*'s book review editor. The first of Mantel's novels that I found was *Fludd* (Owl Books, $13, 181 pp.). The back cover told me that *Fludd* was about transformation, and that Mantel lived in England, was the author of eight novels (*Fludd* is number four), and had recently won the Hawthornden Prize.

At the first page I knew I had found something everyone who loves reading yearns for: a voice that signifies. I savored the sentences. In *Fludd* there are vivid descriptions, great turns of phrase, and an abundance of rich, dark humor. Throughout there is a feeling of foreboding; something ominous veiled just beneath the already strange events. I felt myself mentally squinting to see deeper into the ether.

Fludd is about religion, God, and human hope. The year is 1956 and the place Fetherhoughton, an English village whose oppressive banality is epitomized by Mantel's description of housewives' slippers. The charismatic Fludd appears at the village church, where the pastor, Father Angwin, has been resisting changes proposed by his forward-looking, vapid bishop. Is the new priest a secret emissary from the bishop, or from higher up?

To say Fludd is no run-of-the-mill priest is an understatement. Whether he's talking to Father Angwin, who believes in the church but not God, or to Mother Perpetua, the tyrant of the convent, or to Sister Philomena, who perhaps didn't become a nun for the right reasons, Fludd's mysterious authority makes itself felt.

Fludd doesn't believe in the status quo. He explains to Sister Philomena, "There are times in life when you must murder the past. Take a hatchet to what you used to be. Ax down the familiar world. It's hard, very painful, but it is better to do it than to keep the soul trapped in circumstances it can no longer abide. It may be that we had a way of life that used to satisfy us, but it does so no more; or a dream which has soured by long keeping, or a pleasure which has become habit. Outworn expectations, Sister, are a cage in which the soul rots away, like a mangy beast in a menagerie."

After reading *Fludd*, I hunted for the rest of Mantel's novels. I've got them all now and am reading them in chronological order (a Christmas present to myself!). Here's a report from my reading to date.

Mantel's first, *Every Day Is Mother's Day* (Owl Books, $13, 225 pp.), is the story of sometime medium Evelyn Axon and her demented daughter, Muriel. It is also the story of social worker Isabel Field and her married lover, Colin. Much of what drives the novel is coincidence. Isabel's father and Muriel both wander in the same park. Colin's sister

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lives next door to the Axons. Isabel is the Axons' caseworker. All the characters lead dismal, joyless lives. Throughout there are moments when things could go differently, if only...but alas, they don't. The magic here is in the telling. Mantel's style is at once macabre and matter-of-fact. Dark and depressing and depraved as the characters' lives are, they are real. And funny. And (great to tell) surprising.

Vacant Possessions (Owl Books, $13, 242 pp.) is a sequel to *Every Day Is Mother's Day*. Muriel Axon is back from having been locked away for ten years in a psychiatric hospital for killing her mother, Evelyn. Muriel is hell-bent on revenge against those who put her there: Isabel, Colin, and their families. Bad things happen and lots of them. Again, Mantel spins the tale with a deft and elegant dark humor. A drunken dinner party is particularly hilarious.

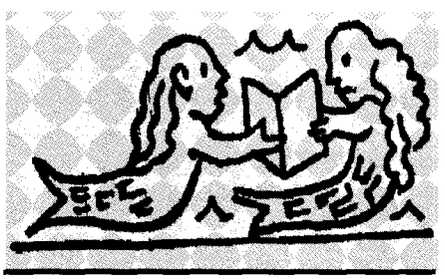
In *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* (Owl Books, $12, 278 pp.), Mantel's insightful wit yields to a frosty cynicism. The heroine, Frances Shore, is a cartographer joining her husband for a stint in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Frances does not feel at home in the expatriate community nor with the locals nor her husband. Because she is a woman, and a foreigner, she cannot work, she cannot move freely, she cannot dress as she would like. The intrigue builds steadily as Frances acts out her growing alienation. In comparison to Mantel's earlier books, *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* lacks cohesion and a satisfying closure. Still, I swear, it is worth a read.

Mantel's voluminous fifth novel, *A Place of Greater Safety* (Owl Books, $15, 749 pp.), is about the French Revolution. It is loaded with intrigue, historical detail, and Mantel's particular brand of dark humor. In the last paragraph of the author's note, Mantel expresses with great clarity a notion about novel writing that sums up, to my mind, why she is a writer like no other:

> I am very conscious that a novel is a cooperative effort, a joint venture between writer and reader. I purvey my own version of events, but facts change according to your viewpoint. Of course, my characters did not have the blessing of hindsight; they lived from day to day, as best they could. I am not trying to persuade my reader to view events in a particular way, or to draw any particular lessons from them. I have tried to write a novel that gives the reader scope to change opinions, change sympathies: a book that one can think and live inside. The reader may ask how to tell fact from fiction. A rough guide: anything that seems particularly unlikely is probably true.

If you are the kind of reader Mantel describes, do not miss these books.

Or, if you find that you have a literary sweet tooth this holiday season, Lynne Sharon Schwartz's farcical *In the Family Way* (William Morrow, $24, 323 pp.) might be just the confection. The setting is a rambling, prewar apartment building in contemporary Manhattan. This is home to the wildly extended family of Roy and Bea, a bona fide earth mother. Aside from her family devotions, Bea runs a catering business and carries on with the building super, Dmitri. That's okay because Bea and Roy are divorced (Roy left Bea for Serena, who divorced Roy for Bea's sister, May). Everyone lives in the building and everyone is friendly. So friendly in fact, that when Serena and May decide they want a child, it is Roy whom Serena approaches; he agrees after Bea approves. Roy simultaneously conceives a child with his young new wife, who finds all this togetherness a bit puzzling. And Roy is also soon to be a grandfather: his adult son, fathered in Vietnam but raised by Bea after the mother's death, is expecting too. *In the Family Way* closes, appropriately, in the maternity ward, with all three babies making their entrances. What is a family? Here is one Upper West Side version. □



Richard Griffin

Richard Griffin, onetime Catholic chaplain at Harvard University, now focuses on aging and spirituality and, as a journalist, writes weekly columns on these two subjects for Boston-area newspapers.

Thomas Lynch does not come immediately to mind as a writer whose books make readers think of Christmas. And yet, in his unique character as poet, essayist, and professional undertaker, Lynch takes an incarnational approach that reminds one that Christmas implies the divinization of the human body.

In his most recent book, *Bodies in Motion and at Rest* (Norton, $23, 192 pp.), Lynch writes about people dead and living, in ways that respect the human body, with its vulnerability and resilience. And he exposes the self-deceptions characteristic of American culture. Lynch, as befits his profession, is always elemental and unflinching in looking at death, and life too. His often ironic, sometimes sardonic style will not please every reader but his world-view also has profound religious roots.

Autobiographical revelation looms large in this small volume. A reformed alcoholic, Lynch describes the struggles to come back to himself. "What I've learned from my sobriety, from the men and women who keep me sober, is how to pray. Blind drunks who get sober get a kind of blind faith—not so much a vision of who God is, but who God isn't, namely me."

Like many another writer, Tom Lynch ultimately wants "to make sense out of what we're doing here." That aim drives him to look at his own life and that of others, so as to notice what escapes most of the rest of us. If you look at his book-jacket photo—round black hat, black suit and bow tie—you will see someone who combines the antic, the absurd, and the visionary.

In his chapter "Y2Kat," Lynch promises that by the time we read this essay, the cat will have died. If only for hilariously interrupting Tom's lovemaking

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with his ardently desired ladylove one night, this animal deserved whatever reprisals Tom could carry out. Whether his promise to readers about the cat meeting its demise has been fulfilled, I cannot say.

Little Saint (Random House, $25, 352 pp.) breathes a spirituality unique to Conques, a village in southwestern France. There Hannah Green, an American Protestant, lived part-time for more than twenty years with her husband Jack, relishing the atmosphere of a place seemingly immune from changes wrought by the modern world. The center of her attention was always Sainte Foy, who was martyred in the fourth century at the age of twelve and became the glory of this village after her remains were transferred and enthroned there five centuries after her death.

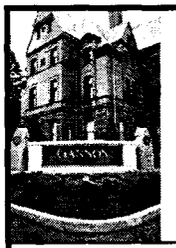
Published posthumously, this book transcends any one genre, encompassing as it does history, memoir, devotional, and travel literature. *Little Saint* enhances the author's reputation that previously rested on one recently reissued novel, *The Dead of the House* (Turtle Point, $12, 240 pp.). Green herself described what she was doing: "I was listening to the voices of the ages, absorbing a spirit, a feeling, a whole realm of faith—its structure, its symbols, its life. I was looking for everything that might relate either directly or indirectly to Sainte Foy and to Conques, its people, their language, its architecture, its art, its history."

Among the richly drawn characters presented by Green, Father André, the keeper of the shrine, emerges most memorably. In his white habit, armed with a flashlight, he shows tourists the treasures, and provides learned commentary. This priest of the Premonstratensian order remains "utterly devoted to Sainte Foy," signing himself as "caretaker of this radiance." But he subtly chafes under the authority that chains him to his job and endures bouts of depression interrupting his periods of peace.

Green intends to confine her narrative to one twenty-four-hour period, though parts slip over to other times. It's a work of serious culture that shows a sensitivity distinctive among spiritual writers. The dominance of one saint, forever a young girl, gives to this craggy part of the world an altogether exotic atmosphere, though this cult is lived out by people engaged each day in earning their living.

Frederick Buechner has long been recognized as one of this country's premier writers. Novelist and spiritual guide, Buechner is a man of insight and profound religious feeling. In this most recent book, *The Eyes of the Heart* (HarperSanFrancisco, $18, 183 pp.), he also writes with a gerontological edge that enhances its value for readers fascinated with the mystery of age.

This work, filled with recollections of people close to him who have passed on to another life, features a dialogue with his grandmother. Naya, as he calls her,



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died in 1961 but comes into his study imaginatively for a dialogue about eternal life. When Fred asks her if she sees people she used to know, her answer proves provocative: "Words like see don't do very well on this side of things. But yes, they are here. They are part of what, ever so slowly, we move deeper and deeper toward, or into, or through—whatever the preposition is. They are part of what we begin little by little to understand at last."

Much else follows that will pique the inner life of readers willing to move beyond surfaces. Buechner finds in other deceased family members and friends, continuing presences that stir his imagination and induce him to revalue human experience transformed by a loving God. □

CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 4)

tion of "health" would pass constitutional muster. Given the known views of various members of the Court on the abortion question, it is quite conceivable that a majority would support such an approach.

One idea might be to limit the health exception to those cases where carrying a pregnancy to term would cause permanent loss of function or a disability lasting more than twelve months. The latter standard is what is required for an applicant to receive Social Security Disability Insurance. There is a substantial body of law and regulation related to the definition and medical documentation of disability that could be appropriated for this purpose.

The advantage of enacting a general ban on late-term abortions as described above is that it avoids the absurdity of trying to regulate particular abortion procedures. Propaganda value aside, it is hard to see why the "partial-birth" procedure is any more morally objectionable than the other methods used at that stage of pregnancy, which tend to be equally gruesome. It is also quite easy to see how physicians could make minor modifications to the "partial birth" procedure to evade the intent of any law.

Whether the approach described above could have commanded support from either Congress or the White House is unclear. What is clear is that neither side in the debate was seriously interested in giving it a try. Rather than trying to reconcile the serious moral claims of both pregnant women and unborn children, prolife and prochoice partisans were more interested in inflaming passions and mobilizing their troops for the election. We are all the losers for it.

PETER NIXON
Concord, Calif.

Much too much

Jo McGowan's column (October 20) on raising children in America in contrast to India reflects many of my own views. Most middle-income American children receive too much and are too much in the center of their parents' focus or guilt, having many of their desires gratified instantly.

My wife and I raised seven children deliberately without TV. We believed it stifled imagination, discouraged reading, and encouraged children to become consumer trainees. After she died, I maintained the TV blackout which was sometimes difficult because six of the children were teenagers and their friends were allowed to watch too much. As a result, the friends had the latest clothing, games, and other trendy items that were advertised on the tube. Occasionally, I would be pressured to buy some trendy item, which I knew was unnecessary and destined to disappear very soon as a hot item. My answer was always the same—earn it—because I believed that when they matched their work time with the cost of the item, their enthusiasm would rapidly fade, which it did. I see now how children and grandchildren are indulged with closetfuls of toys they will never enjoy to the fullest.

I am also offended at the waste of food in America, especially by young people. I cannot understand the half-eaten meals that are thrown in the garbage by the students at the university where I teach. It is not as if they come from affluent families. Most are first-generation college educated. But their parents probably did not live through the Depression, when most of us were urged to clean our plates for the starving people throughout the world. This may not have helped the starving, but at least it developed good habits.

Unfortunately, it may take another depression for this generation to develop good habits and the moderation that is the ultimate hallmark of a good life.

A.W. GODFREY
Port Jefferson, N.Y.

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BAPTIST IS NICE. CATHOLIC IS HOME.

Christopher A. Conroy

My sabbatical at the First Baptist Church began for the same reasons I expect any number of Christians join churches. I was impressed with the pastor, interested in the church's ministry to the poor, and cajoled by a daughter whose best friend was a member.

At first, the differences from the Catholic church overwhelmed me. I felt out of place not carrying my Bible into the sanctuary. The grape juice was worse than any sacramental wine I had ever tasted. Contrary to my expectation, sin and punishment were almost never the topic of sermons or discussion.

Strangest of all, members seemed totally uninterested in an articulated belief. No talk of the content of revelation, the natures in the person of Christ, the meaning of grace, the sacraments. In this maelstrom of doctrinal uncertainty, I sought the counsel of a friend, an Episcopal priest. He nodded matter-of-factly: "Confessional, not creedal. The Baptists say 'Jesus is Lord!' and know their Scriptures, but have not developed a creed of explication, let alone something like the Catholic catechism of truths."

I came to cherish living without any doctrinal contention. Part of me was exhausted from being asked to grapple with everything from the nature of evil to what constitutes a valid marriage. I prized doing the Christian work of charity undaunted by anxious concern about what truths to hold or what doctrinal errors to reject. That had begun to feel like a waste of spiritual energy. At First Baptist I also felt freed from my Catholic tendency to rely upon an authority figure to articulate what it is I should believe, or worse, must believe.

The second eye-opening difference was the extraordinary amount of money Baptists give to their churches in comparison with Catholics. As assistant to the treasurer, I tallied the giving and prepared tax statements. Many members gave their full tithe. For a while, a young courting couple, considered together, were the largest givers. She was a recently transferred executive at IBM and made regular, generous donations. He had followed her from their native Oklahoma to New Jersey, and was working in construction. He seemed to make between $170 and $2,200 per week, judging by his contributions. They left First Baptist (let me confess my Marley-like soul rued the money) when the congregation chose a woman to be interim pastor. "The women," he quoted from Paul, "should keep silence in the churches."

And so to the third difference: Baptists choose their own pastors. I doubt it was a usual run, but First Baptist chose two permanent and one interim pastor in my seven years there. I enjoyed being a "de facto" member of the search committee (from some Jansenistic scruple, I never officially joined the church). Trying to decide to whom we would offer the pastorship was as close as I ever came to being a cardinal. Our nominee, however, was not compelled by tradition and the Holy Spirit to accept. This was a job offer.

"I don't get it—if John the Baptist was so good, how come we're Catholics?"

I was struck (as I am with Catholic priests) by how little pastors are paid for a demanding job. Further, in the case of the Baptist pastor, he or she is not "the boss" as is the Catholic counterpart. At First Baptist, the pastor was clearly an employee (a true "servant of the servants of God"). There were scads of committees, even in this small congregation. While I usually described First Baptist as a democracy, it was really a republic with full participation of all the citizens on every issue. Baptists are conscious of "owning" their churches in a way Catholics are not. There is no "Let Father worry about that."

There came a time when the church faded to a very small group without a regular minister. I was saddened, but not completely surprised, since the obverse of the coin of completely local control is lack of institutional ties, which part of me always missed. I began to attend Mass again, and to be drawn by the Eucharist. The deep-seated habits of faith made my return to Catholicism effortless and even unremarkable. What I noticed most was that there was a community spirit among Catholics that I had not perceived seven years before, and I cheerfully recognize that the fault was probably in me.

After my sojourn among the Baptists, I am less sure than I was as a young person that Catholicism is for everyone. I don't think Christian unity under a pope is a realistic goal for this new century. But I, at least, am a Catholic.

I don't consider myself a prodigal. I'm wiser and humbler, I hope, from my sabbatical, and now I'm home. □

Christopher A. Conroy, *director of finance for a large New York City law firm, attends the Newman Catholic Center at Montclair State University near his home.*

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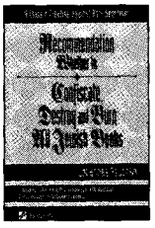

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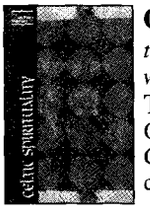

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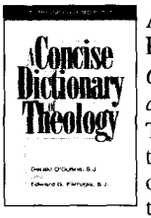

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